

**“The Recovery of the World”
John 17:20-26**

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A U.S. Army Brigadier General went grocery shopping with his wife, something he seldom did. As the couple walked through the aisles, the general's wife kept giving him instructions. “The cereal is in aisle 4, get the large sized crushed tomatoes, remember low-fat yogurt, put the chips back -- too much salt.”

On and on it went. Finally the general, in a whisper that could be heard half way around the store said, “Here I am, a U. S. Army Brigadier General and I'm taking orders from my wife.” A man close by hearing the general's lament, rolled his cart full of groceries up beside the general and said, “Don't despair sir, with additional training, and another promotion, she might even send you to the grocery store on your own.”

Jesus is about to send His disciples out on their own to save the world. It's an impossible task. He does the right thing for them. He lifts them up in prayer. He asks God almighty to unify them, protect them, and purify them so that they may be able in the name of Christ to save the world. Then He prays for us who will believe their message.

Here's what He says: **For the sake of the world, stick together.** Verse 20 of the scripture lesson today says, *“I pray for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us that the world may believe.”*

Robert Fulgham said it best in that little creed for life entitled, *All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. In it, he says, “When you go out into the world, it is best to hold

hands.”

“I pray that they may be one,” said Jesus. The unity implied here is not uniformity where all look alike, think alike and act alike. The unity Jesus prays for is more like a symphony, where each plays a part that contributes to the whole. So I ask you -- under what conductor are you blowing your horn? To the beat of what drummer are you marching? To whose tune are you singing your song?

It is a Memorial Day weekend. For many, this weekend means an extra day off from work, a trip to the lake, a cookout with friends, a dip in the pool, the official beginning of those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer. It was designed, however, as something entirely different. Lest we forget, let us pause to remember today that over the last 225 years, over 1.2 million Americans have died in combat defending our freedom to worship, to play, to work, to speak as we like. For those of you still among us, we pause to say thank you. We are grateful to you for your gifts of service.

And in the spirit of Jesus’ prayer, we affirm that other lands have sunlight too. Their hopes and dreams are as true and high as ours. Or as Georgia Harkness said more than half a century ago:

*This is my prayer O Lord of all earth’s kingdoms
Thy kingdom come, on earth, thy will be done.
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve Him.
And hearts united learn to live as one.*

It’s time for the world to learn to sing in harmony. It’s time to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into gardening tools. It’s time to exchange our rugged individualism for caring community. Around the world and close to home, it’s time to stick together lest we perish apart as fools.

Sandy and I took a few days of vacation last week. We were welcomed to our cabin with our neighbors' sewage backing up in our bathtub. What a wonderful welcome. I examined the problem and immediately diagnosed the issue. "It's broke, call the plumber," I said. The plumber came and discovered the problem to be in the main sewer. He removed the tap and three feet of sewage shot out in our yard. In the context of the experts telling me that it may not be fixed for the rest of the day, the plumber posed a difficult, ethical decision. He said to me, "I can stop your sewer and flood everybody else's basement down the road. What do you want me to do?" Now, what would YOU have done? For the sake of the world it's time to stick together. For the sake of the world, we've got to watch out for one another. Do you want to know what I did? No, I didn't cap my sewer. No, we stuck together, and, yes, we finally got the problem solved. For the sake of the world, we've got to learn to stick together, even when it's messy.

For the sake of the world, we must dream big. Listen to Verse 24: *Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me.*

Perhaps Don Quixote, that 'Man from La Mancha,' said it the best:

To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go. To right the unrightable wrong, to love pure and chaste from afar, to try when your arms are too weary, to reach the unreachable star. This is my quest, to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far, to fight for the right, without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause.

Do you catch it? For the sake of the world, dream BIG dreams. One of the best selling books on the market today is the *Prayer of Jabez*. Jabez was a little known Biblical character mentioned in I Chronicles, Chapter 4. I'm sure you read all the genealogy of Chronicles on your way to church. All we know about little known Jabez is two verses in I Chronicles 4:9-10. We know his mother thought he was a pain because that's what Jabez means, pain. Can't you imagine going through life being called a pain? We know this prayer that he prayed: "Oh that you would bless me, and enlarge my territory. Let your hand be with me, and keep me from doing harm so that I will be free from pain." How long has it been since you asked God to give you more work to do? How long has it been since you prayed to the Lord and said, "Could you make it a little harder please? I would really appreciate it. I need more responsibility, more work; I need more decisions to make." That was the prayer of Jabez. To dream impossible dreams, the world needs dreamers like that.

Sadako Sasuki was just two years old when the bomb fell on Hiroshima. She fled with her mother and her brother running to the Oto River. They didn't know that the radioactive black rain falling on them throughout the day would destroy their lives. For the first twelve years, Sadako did pretty well and then leukemia hit. She spent her days making paper cranes. You see a paper crane is an ancient Japanese symbol of long life, hope, good will, and happiness. According to legend if you make 1,000 paper cranes, you will be well. So Sadako started making little paper cranes. She said, "I will write peace on your wings and you will fly all over the world." She made 964 of them before she died. Her friends made the rest of them and they buried her in a casket with 1,000 paper cranes. When they built a monument in that community honoring all the children who died from that bomb, this is what they wrote on that stone: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace for the world." Dream impossible dreams.

At the early service today, we had this whole altar filled with graduating high school seniors. We had a special prayer for them. Deech told me there were 35 to 40. I thought there were at least 100. It was a beautiful sight. I said to them and I say to my young friends who may be in this service today launching out on a new adventure, dream big dreams. Undertake something so big for God that you know you absolutely cannot do it by yourself. Take on some vision that is doomed to failure unless God intervenes and does it for you. Set out to do no harm. Determine that you'll leave the world a better place than you found it; that you'll put in more than you take out. For the sake of the world, stick together. For the sake of the world, dream big dreams.

For the sake of the world, serve well. Verse 26: *I have made You known to them in order that the love You have for Me may be in them.* The sacrificial love of which Christ is speaking is none other than the unconditional, overwhelming love of God. It is so great, so powerful and so amazing that He gave His only Son for you and for me. Yes, sometimes love means sacrifice. Some of you know that.

Pearl Harbor is the new movie in theaters this weekend. It's the story about two Tennessee boys who become hot shot fighter pilots and find themselves, sixty years ago, defending Pearl Harbor in the bombing that took more than twenty-four hundred American lives. While I have yet to see the movie I understand that one boy says to the other, "I'm not anxious to die. I'm just anxious to matter." Did you get that? Not anxious to die, just anxious to matter.

David Letterman asked Tom Brokaw the other night on the Late Show, "Do you think America any longer has the kind of persons that you wrote about in the *Greatest Generations*? Are there still people in the world who will give themselves unreservedly for the good of others?" Good question, David,

good question. For the sake of the world, serve well. Sometimes service demands my life, my all, but most often it just asks for my daily devotion.

Fred Craddock used to say, "I'm ready to go out in a blaze of glory. I'm willing to become a martyr for a great cause. If life were a matter of \$1,000 I'm willing to lay it all on the line in a moment. My experience is that the Lord tells me to go down to the bank with my \$1,000 and cash it in for quarters. Then He tells me to spend the rest of my life giving a quarter here and fifty cents there, help a little here and a little there as life goes along. To listen to the neighbor kids' troubles instead of saying "Get lost." To go to a committee meeting for the good of the community when it feels better to stay home. To give a cup of cold water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. "Living our lives for Christ is generally not glorious," said Craddock, "it's just little acts of love, one quarter at a time."

By her own confession she said, "I only have two faults in life. One is that I'm always late for church and the other is that I usually buy too many clothes when I go shopping." One day on the way out of church, she saw an old man bent over with arthritis. She offered to take him home and he accepted. When they got to his house, he invited her in and she discovered that he lived in a very sparse apartment. She also discovered that he walked two miles to church every Sunday morning and that he liked to get there fifteen minutes early so that he could pray for the service. So that night, she decided to change a habit. She would start getting up early enough on Sunday morning to bring the old man to church fifteen minutes early. She also decided that now and then she would spruce up his apartment a little bit and bring him a little food to eat. The relationship developed over the months until one year later she got a phone call from her pastor. The old man was dead. She went to his funeral and she was the only person there. The pastor, dispensing with ritual, said, "He wanted me to tell you, you were all he had, you changed his

life by your care.” Pour out your life one quarter at a time.

For the sake of the world, serve well, dream big, stick together. That is Christ’s prayer for you. Amen.