

## UNITY FOR THE SAKE OF MISSION

John 17:20-23

Leaders are uniting for the sake of kingdom mission in our region like never before. God's people are uniting. People in our pews are uniting in new and unprecedented ways to display the love and hope of Jesus Christ throughout South Florida. So Riverside, be very encouraged this morning because God is on the move.

Brian shared that the Church is like a family, and I just leaned over to tell him in that family I would probably be the crazy Uncle Eddie. Everyone's got that crazy uncle, and for our family it would probably be me. But, as Executive Director of Church United, I have the humble privilege to share a front row seat to God's unique work in this community. Over the last year and a half I have seen God bring churches and leaders together, not for "Kumbaya – let's all worship together," but true unity for the sake of kingdom mission. I've seen your pastors and your leadership lean into this, to sacrifice their time and their resources for the sake of what God is doing in South Florida.

Before we get going this morning, I want you to know how thankful I and the other pastors and leaders of Church United are for your leadership, for your pastors, for your elders, and specifically for your pastor, Brian. Can we just give Brian a round of applause, please? Brian, I want to personally say thank you for leaning into this. Thank you for giving of your time and your resources to see this vision realized. On behalf of the capital 'C' Church, what you have done, the way you shepherd and pastor other leaders is very, very unique and I want to say thank you. And Riverside, Brian, and Church, we are just getting started. This vision is just getting started.

It's an honor and a privilege to be here with you this morning to shed some light on what we feel God is doing with his Church here in South Florida. This morning we are going to be looking at John 17, a section of scripture that is known as Jesus' high priestly prayer. It is a prayer that is broken up into three parts:

- 1) Christ's prayer for himself in verses 1-5.
- 2) His prayer for his immediate disciples in verses 6-19.
- 3) Then his prayer for all of those who would follow him in faith in the coming century in verses 20-26.

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Theologian James Montgomery Boice famously said of this section of scripture: “This section of scripture should be to us something of what the burning bush was to Moses, for here we hear God speaking, and we should put off our shoes and bow humbly, being that we are about to tread on the most hallowed ground.” This morning we are going to specifically look at verses 20 and 23 of John 17. We are going to spend some time together reflecting on these three points. We are going to ask:

- I. What is unity?
- II. Why is unity important?
- III. How does unity come to us?

We are going to spend most of our time on the last point: How does unity come to us? How do we experience it? How do we live it out? With that in mind, let me read our sermon text and then ask God to join us as we open his word this morning. If you have an iPhone or a Kindle or a good old-fashioned Bible, or maybe it's on the screen here, I invite you to read along with me as we read from God's word, starting in verse 20.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also 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 so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Pray with me. Father, as we just sang, we come running to your arms this morning. As we just tasted your goodness and drank your goodness together as a body, we are reminded that in this moment that you are for us, you love us, you dwell with us. And Lord, you are doing something in spite of us and through us, for your glory and for your kingdom. So Father, we greet you this morning as a people who daily fall short of living in unity. Father, we daily fall short of living in light of the implications of your gospel. So Lord, would you forgive us? Would you remind us of your love and grace and mercy anew as we open up your word and hear from you this morning? Amen.

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I don't know if you know this, but historically churches are kind of known more for what they are against rather than what they are for. If you're new to faith, or if you're just experiencing faith this morning, you probably already knew that, if you're honest. I hate to break it to you, but we are probably not the most unified folks. It's just kind of our reputation. We are known as the "don't drink" people, the "don't smoke" people, the "don't have sex before marriage" people, the "don't cut your grass on Sunday" people, the "don't \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank)" people. It's not necessarily that some of those things are bad, it's just kind of our reputation. It's what we are known for.

Disagree with something? Disagree with someone? Okay, just leave the church. Find a new one. Disagree with something major, like the type of music a church should enjoy? Well, well, well, grab some friends, start a Bible study, and slowly start forming a 501(c)(3) and start a new church. Come up with a really creative name like (ready for this?): "Second Presbyterian Church." I've spent a lot of time in the Presbyterian tradition so I feel like I can get away with that one. We are just not the most creative folks when it comes to church names.

I grew up in the church. I've always had this deep affinity, this connection, this love for the local church. And as I have grown up in the church, I have seen the power of the local church. I've seen the church respond to homelessness and provide creative crisis housing solutions to homeless children and families. I've seen the church leverage its resources to purchase apartment buildings to be used as affordable housing. I've seen the church care for refugees in really innovative and creative ways. I've seen the church run towards the foster care system and care for orphans and widows. I've seen the church unite in times of crisis to provide hope, help, and healing. I'd like to say I have seen the church at its best, but I have also seen the church at its worst.

And no matter what you can leverage at me, what story you could bring about the church, I stand before you here this morning as someone who is deeply, deeply convinced and convicted that the local church, the Church of Jesus Christ, you and I, God's people, are the hope of the world. And if we're the hope of the world, we are the hope of South Florida. And if we are the hope of South Florida, we are the hope of Broward County. You see where I am going with this. If we are the hope of Broward County, we are the hope of North Lauderdale. The local church is the hope of the world.

It would only be appropriate, then, as part of my story as someone who grew up in the church, that one of my first jobs was working for LifeWay Christian Bookstores when I was 16. If you don't know

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what LifeWay is, it's kind of like a brick and mortar amazon.com for all the stuff you can't buy at the Cracker Barrel store with Christian stuff on it. I'm going to give you a little factoid. The Cracker Barrel store and LifeWay for years had the same buyer and the same merchandiser. One would go one way for crosses, one would go one way for cute little roosters. I kid you not.

Anyway, I'm going to share a couple of stories because God started planting some seeds in me when I was even 16 years old and started to ask some questions about the Church. Because when you work at LifeWay you get some odd customers. You get some odd ducks. I remember one time – I was 16, and this mom came in. She left her kids with her stroller outside the store. She comes over to the counter and says, "Hey, excuse me. Before I let my family in, can you please turn off VeggieTales in the kids' section? We don't allow our kids to listen to that. "Oh, okay."

On a different occasion another family came in. "Hey, I need you to turn off the overhead music. It has drums in it and we don't allow our family to listen to music with drums in it." I go, "Ahh, it's Michael W. Smith. I don't understand." How much more vanilla can it get? But, you know, because I was 17 and I really needed that \$7 an hour to put gas in my car, I'd oblige them and on we'd go with the day.

But I remember getting into my Datsun 280z (I miss that car, man!) -- I remember getting into that car and just driving home thinking, "How in the world has God's people, how has the Church gotten to a place where we can't even agree on cute little animated cucumbers singing 'Jesus Love Me' to children?" How have we gotten to this place? It's to our shame! How are we going to unite to care for orphans and widows and be the hope of the world if we can't agree that little, cute, animated vegetables singing "Jesus Loves Me" is a good thing? I mean, think about it!

John White, the former president of campus ministry InterVarsity Christian Fellowship once famously said this: "Considering all the divisions that have plagued Christendom for 2000 years, it's amazing that God has continued to use the Church to extend his kingdom on earth." Spend a week working at a LifeWay and you'll understand the power of that statement.

But let's make it a little more plain. Turn on CNN. Turn on Fox News. Get out your phone and scroll through social media and read some comments. It won't take you but one second to realize just how divided and angry God's people are. This morning, here in John 17, we find some of the last words of Jesus, just 24 hours before he goes off to his death. We find him praying for you and me. We find him pleading with his Father for our unity.

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If you've ever been around someone who is dying or is on their deathbed, you'll find that they don't really appreciate small talk. They aren't talking with you about the weather. They aren't saying, "Oh, nice shoes, Brian. Where did you get them?" Or, "Ooh, I like your sport coat." No, no, no, no. They are talking with you from their heart. They are talking about the wisdom and the words that they want to be remembered by. They are talking with you about their legacy. And that is exactly where we find Jesus this morning.

Notice in verse 20 that at this point Jesus very directly begins to pray for you and for me – for anyone who professes faith and claims to be a Christian. One translation puts it this way in verse 20: "I no longer just pray for my disciples, the people here in the room with me. I also pray for those who will believe in me through their message." From this point through the end of our passage, Jesus is very clearly communicating what he desires most for us, what he wants most for you and me in this room if we call ourselves Christians, if we profess faith in him, if we are Christ's ones, Christ's followers.

I want you to see what's happening here. We are getting a glimpse into the very heart of God, into what he desires most for us and what he wants for us. If you're anything like me, I want to know what the King of kings and Lord of lords wants and most desires for my life and for our lives if we are to call ourselves Christians.

To be honest with you, I have always pictured Jesus here in this passage kind of gently grabbing my hand, or very gently grabbing my face and pulling me in and saying, "Son, children, listen to me. I'm about to die, and I want you to be in complete unity. I know it's going to be hard. I know you're going to find things that you disagree with. I know that you're going to feel strongly about some points, but listen: Do whatever it takes. Let the love that I have given you unify you. Fight for it. It's worth it. I'll see you in heaven."

Later on in verse 23, he expands what he means here. He says, "I want them to be in complete unity." So what is unity, our first point?

### I. What is unity?

Unity, we are going to see, is rooted in love. It's rooted at the very core of the gospel, the essential message of Jesus Christ. It's a radical, openhandedness towards other believers, other Christians.

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It's a peculiar group of countercultural people coming together to share life, to share resources, to share problems, to share burdens, to band arms together for the sake of God's mission, for the sake of God's kingdom here on earth. You know that's what the Church is, right? The capital 'C' Church – Riverside and Calvary Chapel and First Baptist (name the church) -- the universal Church serves as a demonstration to the watching world of community when it is at its best. You and I, God's people, the Church, demonstrate what God's kingdom looks like if it were to be lived out here in Broward County as it is in heaven. We display the reality of God's kingdom together.

The early Church is described in the New Testament book of Acts. What happened? It spread like wildfire because of the aroma of their unity, because of the aroma of the love that they had for one another. You see, no matter what your story was, no matter where you came from, no matter what you had done, no matter what you had done right, no matter what you had done wrong or how you encountered these Christians – none of that mattered. All that mattered is that you were a follower of Jesus. He had stirred something in your heart and you wanted to be a part of that. That's all that mattered.

Think I'm wrong? Does this sound familiar? "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was naked and you said, 'Here, take my clothes. Let me clothe you.' I was orphaned and widowed and you provided me a new home. I was in debt and you gave me money because you had this mindset that it's not mine anyway. It all belongs to the Lord." And what happened, church? "The Lord added to their number daily." The Church exploded because of the aroma of this radical love and unity. Unity is uncommon love.

I know you instantly picked up on this factoid when Brian introduced me, but my name: Eddie Patrick Copeland, or Edwin Patrick Copeland (I just go by Eddie), is half Greek. It sounds super Greek, right? I was actually born in Athens, Greece. My mom is Greek and Greece is all I knew for the first part of my childhood. In case you are wondering, all of the stereotypes from "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" are 100% accurate. If anything ails you, I have Windex in my car. Come see me. I will squirt you and it will be better. No, I'm just kidding. But in my house it was actually rubbing alcohol. My mom put rubbing alcohol on everything but food. And I think she would have sprinkled it on food if my dad would have let her. But rubbing alcohol cured everything, in her mind. I'm still not convinced. But there's something really interesting about Greeks. When you meet another Greek, you share this instant bond.

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I was in New York last year and I was just walking through a crosswalk. I heard some Greeks talking and my ears kind of perked up. I went, “Ooh, they’re Greek!” so I literally started following them, like creepy. Like, “Hey!” I was eavesdropping and I just had to find a way to butt in. Sure enough, I did. I spoke to them in Greek and it was an instant, “Hey!” We kind of had a party right there on the sidewalk. And they loved it! You’re like instant friends.

You see, when you meet a Greek, not only does the room all of a sudden get a lot louder, you begin to talk about Greece. You begin to ask about which part you’re from. How long have you been in America? And the inevitable question that always gets just a little awkward for me: “So, what Orthodox Church do you go to?” “Well...that’s kind of a long story.” But there’s this instant comradery. There’s this shared commonality, this connection, this affinity – all before you even know or ask for that other person’s name. You’re Greek. That’s all that matters.

You see, when I meet another Greek, whether they’re a Republican or a Democrat, it doesn’t matter. Our differences don’t cross my mind. What they do for a living, how much money they have or don’t have – none of that matters or even crosses my mind. All that matters is: They’re Greek. There is a commonality. There is a kinship. There is a connection. Our identity as Greeks supersedes everything else.

Ephesians chapter 2 in the New Testament says you and I, Christians, you and I were dead to our trespasses of sin but have been made alive in Jesus Christ. Listen to this: If you’re in this room this morning and you identify as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you were dead and now you’re alive. Let that sink in for a moment. If you’re a Christian, if you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you were dead, and now you’ve been made alive. Your identity has entirely changed. You are no longer a slave to sin. You are no longer under the weight of its judgment. You are a son and daughter of the King. That shared experience of a people that have moved from death into new life is what unites us. That is the secret sauce of our unity. We are a people who have moved from death into new life.

The uncommon and undeserved love that you and I have experienced in Jesus, moving from death to life, pushes aside everything else. All of a sudden, race and class and position and vocation and politics and money and all of the things that could be used to segment us, to divide us get pushed aside and they are replaced by the radical love and new identity as beloved children of God.

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Christian unity is uncommon love that is rooted in a new identity and a shared experience as a people who have moved from death into new life.

That's our first point. But now our second:

### II. Why is unity important?

Why would this literally be some of the last things Jesus wants to impart to us just 24 hours before he dies? Here's the thing. Please be sure to catch this. Unless the watching world sees a radical, countercultural, open-handed community, a type of people they don't have a category for, I believe that Jesus is saying to us in this passage: "Listen, they are not going to believe in me or the things that I have taught." Did you catch that? Our faith, the claims of Christianity, is rooted in an uncommon, radical love and unity with other Christians.

And we believe some crazy things! Let's just be honest! Here are just three quickly:

- 1) We believe that Jesus was the Son of God
- 2) We believe that Jesus came from heaven to die for us on our behalf, and
- 3) We believe that he rose again on the third day

That's just three of them! But what Jesus is telling us is: "Listen, those claims are going to be really hard to believe if my people, the people that bear my witness and my identity, aren't unified in radical, uncommon love with one another."

Yes, we need to evangelize. Yes, we need to share the gospel and plant churches and work to expand God's kingdom. But none of those things are going to make a lasting impact unless they're backed by a radical unity, unless they're backed by a people who are uncommonly loving, gracious, forgiving, and generous with one another – a people who care deeply, share their possessions, share their resources and their burdens with one another.

Listen, we could talk and share our faith and do service projects all day long. We could do all that stuff until the cows come home, but what Jesus is saying is that the world isn't really going to hear that stuff and it won't make a lasting impact unless it's rooted in a radical, uncommon love – unless it's backed by a people that the world doesn't have a category for.

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Author and pastor, Tim Keller, when talking about unity in this passage, says this. This is good. He says, “There is a positive and negative to the unity that John 17 speaks of. First, the negative; listen to this. Keller says, “The honor of Jesus Christ’s name is bound up in the quality of Christian community.” Let the implications of that phrase just sit with you for a moment. Let your mind ponder that.

Another commentator on this passage asked this question: “Do you know any churches that have gossip, insensitivity, negative criticism, jealousy, coldness, cruelty, greed, selfishness, backbiting, an unforgiving spirit, unloving, and genuine failure to fully welcome people who are different? Perhaps people of other races, classes, or socioeconomic statuses?” He asks, “Do you know any churches like that? Do you know any Christians like that?” Of course you do. We all do. We all know churches and Christians like that. Because here’s the thing: I’m one of them. And if you’re honest, you’re one of them. We so often live this way time and time and time again.

You know what we’re doing when we engage in activity like that? This is not to put any guilt or shame on anyone, because we’re going to see that God comes and provides a radical solution for this. But you know what we’re doing when we engage in activity like that? We are making the name of Jesus Christ ugly to the world. We just are. That 3% number that I’ll talk about in a little bit – when we engage in activity like that, we are kind of making that number make a little more sense.

You see, when people come and darken the doors of a church for the first time or join one of our home groups and they begin to open up about their pain and they begin to speak about the things that matter to them, they are expecting something radically different than what they have experienced or what they are experiencing out in the world. They are expecting a grace and a love and an aroma of something different. You see, in those moments we aren’t just gossiping or backbiting or participating in insensitivity and jealousy. We are damaging the witness of Jesus Christ to the watching world.

In my job I get to look at a lot of research and I feel like we have a pretty good snapshot on the spiritual temperature of Broward County. The last Barna study that we commissioned as of 2017, actually says only 3% of Broward’s population identifies as an evangelical Christian. Friends, listen. Church, we’ve got to ask ourselves: “Why is that? What’s that about?” I’d contend that a big piece of that is because we are so disunified, because our aroma needs some work.

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But that's the negative; now the positive. It must be possible to have and experience this type of unity, this radical, loving community or else Jesus wouldn't be saying it. It's got to be possible in the gospel, in the essential message of Jesus Christ, to experience this type of unity. If Jesus Christ is calling us to live this way, this radical open-handedness, this radical love and uncommon unity, it must be possible.

Lastly:

### III. How does unity come to us?

How do we get it? How do we experience it? We've seen what unity is. We've looked at how it's important. But now, how do we get it? Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, Life Together says, "It's natural for human beings to meet each other and immediately begin to size each other up and compare themselves to one another." It's natural. You and I are constantly sizing people up and making sure that the other people that we encounter are not a threat to our self-worth. We compare each other on looks. We compare each other on status, on material possessions, on opinions, on political affiliation, on vocational choices, on education, on money. Fill in the blank - you and I are constantly doing it. But why? What's that all about? Where does that come from?

I contend to you this morning: I think the majority of that comes from this place in our hearts that deep down we are trying to justify ourselves. We are trying to make ourselves feel worthy, to feel valued, to feel important. That's why there's so much disunity in the church. That's why God's people are so fragmented and angry, because deep down we know that our relationships are fundamentally broken. But you know what's even more broken and fragmented? Our identities -- our identities are broken and fragmented.

I believe Jesus knew this. I believe Jesus knew that this was the tendency of our hearts and where we tended to go. That's why we find him here this morning, praying for us, just 24 hours before his death, pleading with his Father, praying for our unity.

But thankfully, Jesus doesn't leave us in this relational brokenness or this fragmented identity. He provides a solution, a solution that transforms us, that transforms you and me and enables us to be agents of kingdom transformation out in the watching world. It enables us to have these radical

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relationships with one another, this open-handedness, this unity and deep love and affinity with one another.

That takes us to the last sentence of verse 23. “Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Unity is rooted in love. Christian unity is rooted in the fact that you and I have moved from death into new life together. We have a shared experience with one another.

Let’s be sure to catch this last point because it takes us right into the heart of the gospel – the core teachings of what Jesus would have for us. The unity that we are talking about this morning is rooted in the fact that the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the creator of the universe is right now loving you if you are in him more than you could ever dare dream or imagine. That is the root of our unity.

This unity is possible right now if you are in Jesus Christ because here is what we believe as Christians – that God in this moment, right now, loves us as much as he loves his Son. And that reality changes everything and opens up so many possibilities. But do you believe that? Do I believe that? Do I live in light of that? Do we live in light of that as a church day in and day out?

Do you know that if you are sitting in these pews right now as someone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus, that he, Jesus, is looking down from heaven at you and he is beaming with joy. He can’t believe that you are his. He loves you more than you could ever dare dream or imagine. He sees his Son and he’ll do anything for his Son.

Here’s the thing. He’s not interested in what you’ve done right. He’s not interested in what you’ve done wrong. He is simply interested in loving you and rejoicing over the fact that you are his and you belong to him. If you have repented of your sin and put your faith and trust in Jesus you have moved from death into new life. He has given you a new name. He calls you Son. He calls you Daughter.

I have three kids, ages 4, 2, and 4 months. Yes, it is a party at my house. I change a lot of diapers. I don’t sleep a whole lot. I drink a lot of coffee. I admit I’ve had a lot of coffee this morning, so if I’m talking fast, I blame the caffeine. But listen, when I come home, my two older kids are at the door and they are jumping up and down. They have this intuition that Daddy is home. They hear the car door and as soon as I open the door I hear, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” They come running and they

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give me big hugs. And when I get down to hug them, in that moment they have no idea how much I love them, how much I'm for them, how thankful I am for them - that I would do anything for them.

That's Jesus to you and me, right now. That's Jesus when you get home from work each and every day. He is giving you a hug and he is saying, "You have no idea how much I love you, how much I care about you, what I see in you. Would you know that I am enough? Would you rest in the new name, in the new identity as a son and as a daughter that I have given you?"

Jesus gave up everything to have you. He gave up all the freedoms that he experienced in heaven. He came down to earth. He lived the life that you and I should have lived and died a death that you and I deserved to die - all so that he could call you his -- all because he loves you. Friends, listen. This is what makes unity possible, right here - the fact that you and I belong to Jesus.

Your friend who is sitting next to you, who watches Fox News and may have voted for Donald Trump - they belong to Jesus. Your other friend on the other side of you who watches CNN and voted for Hillary Clinton - well, you guessed it. They belong to Jesus. You see, it's not about what you do. It's not about what you don't do. It's not about what you know or what you don't know or what political affiliation you may have. It's not about what you have or don't have. It's not about the fact that you may baptize by fully dunking someone and I may baptize by sprinkling someone. It's not about the fact that you may share one view of the End Times and I would share another. It's not about any of those things. Here's what it's about, church. It's about whose you are and to whom you belong. You belong to Jesus. We belong to Jesus. We are his, and that reality supersedes everything else. Our identity as sons and daughters of the king changes everything.

We can push aside so many things because you are a Christian. You have moved from death into new life. Why am I arguing with you about stuff that doesn't really matter in light of eternity? We are going to spend eternity together. Why not just kick the party off now and get it started? Why are we arguing with one another about these stupid things, if I just can say that? If you're a Christian, if you're someone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus, you belong to him and that reality changes everything.

Catch this: To the degree that you and I believe and live in light of that reality, to the degree that we let that reality sink in and daily repent of our unbelief of that and begin to reorient our hearts, our minds, and our lives around the fact that Jesus changes everything, our identity changes everything -- to the degree that we believe that, we have the ability to be capable of a whole new

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life in the way of relating to others, especially those that differ from us and that we disagree with. Living in light of God's immense love for you and me is what makes our unity possible. It's what fuels the efforts of everything you saw in that video this morning.

It's what fuels the efforts of Church United. You see, the unity that we are experiencing in South Florida – none of that is possible without us living in light of Jesus, as sons and daughters of the King and resting in that identity. There are so many churches and pastors that are part of Church United. And I'll tell you, there are some that I disagree with. There are some that I would kind of really disagree with theologically. But at the end of the day, if they are someone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus and repented of their sins and are trusting in Jesus for their salvation, I have no business arguing with them. I am for them and I am with them.

I'm not going to argue with my brothers and sisters on some other sides of some issues because they are a Christian. We have a shared commonality, a shared experience together. We have a shared mission together. Do we believe some different things? Yeah, of course we do. I mean, I have one set of beliefs I'd feel compelled that the scriptures call us to and my Methodist and Lutheran brothers would have something else. But you know what? At the end of the day what matters is that they belong to Jesus. They've put their faith and trust in the King. Ultimately, I believe that I'm going to see them in heaven because they've put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They have moved from death into new life, and that is what fuels Church United.

It's what fuels the efforts of our evangelism work, our church planting, our education forms and our faith and work initiatives. Everything you saw in that video is fueled by a radical, uncommon love and unity with one another. It's fueled by an aroma of something really peculiar that's beginning to happen here in South Florida. You see, that love that we experience on the cross, the love that we experience in Jesus really does change everything. It transforms you and me and enables us to live in light of what we are talking about this morning.

You see, the more that we live in light of our identities as a people who have passed from death into new life, the more that we dig into that fact and let our minds ponder this gospel reality that you and I are sons and daughters of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the more we are freed to love others, especially those who are different from us.

You see, living in light of this shared identity as sons and daughters of Jesus gives us something else. It also gives us the freedom to rest. It gives us the security that we need to be wrong about

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## Special Message - Unity for the Sake of Mission

John 17:20-23 | Sunday, March 4, 2018 | By Edwin Copeland



certain things, to share our possessions, to give away power, to return authority, to bear one another's burdens. If our identity is in Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear. Resting in our shared experience as a people who have moved from death into new life, resting and finding life in our identities as sons and daughters of the King fuels radical, uncommon love and motivates open-handedness towards others.

Now, all of a sudden, that church plant down the street that may be a little too close for comfort moves from a threat to a celebration. All of a sudden, the prospect of partnering with other churches on strategic kingdom initiatives to see God's kingdom come and his will be done here in South Florida goes from, "Ahh, that would be nice," to "What do I need to do to make that happen?" It becomes an imperative. It becomes something that we have to fight for. It moves from, "Well, I don't know if I can really partner with Brian because, you know, he's got some views that I disagree with. Or, "You know, Eddie's the crazy uncle of the family and he's got some stuff that I disagree with." It moves from that to: "Brother, how can we pray for one another? How can we repent together? How can we link arms to see South Florida spiritually, culturally, and socially change for the sake of God's name?"

Here's the thing, friends. This type of uncommon love and unity is slowly happening in South Florida through Church United, by God's grace, and only by his grace. I've got to tell you, your pastor is playing a big role in that he serves on our leadership team. Many of you may not know this, but with the blessing of his elders, he has given 10 hours a week of his time to shepherd and care for the lives and souls of other pastors and ministers here in our community, to lead some of our soul care efforts, and that is returning so much fruit. It's bearing so much fruit. So, Brian, thank you, man. Thank you again for that.

Many of you may have heard of our Love South Florida initiative that we kicked off two years ago. Every November some of the churches that are involved in Church United band together to do collective outreach together, to pray, to give, and to serve...

