

Editorial: Did God the Father answer Jesus' prayer?

March 27, 2015

On Thursday night of Holy Week, moments before his arrest and mere hours before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for you and for me.

John's Gospel records what Jesus said: "My prayer is not for them (the disciples) 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" (John 17:20-23).



Editor Marv Knox Did God the Father answer one of Jesus' final prayers? Jesus prayed for Christian unity. Jesus requested a divine demonstration of his earthly mission, irrefutably revealed in Christian love. Has God ever answered that prayer?

Love and unity

We know Jesus treasured Christian love and unity. John provides repetitive evidence, both in Jesus' own words and in later teaching:

- “A new command I give you: *Love* one another. As I have *loved* you, so you must *love* one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you *love* one another” (John 13:34-35).
- “My command is this: *Love* each other as I have *loved* you” (John 15:12).
- “Anyone who *loves* their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble” (1 John 2:10).
- “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not *love* their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should *love* one another” (1 John 3:10-11).
- “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we *love* each other. Anyone who does not *love* remains in death” (1 John 3:14).
- “This is how we know what *love* is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).
- “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to *love* one another as he commanded us” (1 John 3:23).
- “Dear friends, let us *love* one another, for *love* comes from God. Everyone who *loves* has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).
- “Dear friends, since God so *loved* us, we also ought to *love* one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we *love* one another, God lives in us and his *love* is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11-12).
- “Whoever claims to *love* God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not *love* their brother and sister, whom they have seen,

cannot *love* God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who *loves* God must also *love* their brother and sister” (1 John 4:20-21).

Questioning whether God the Father answered Jesus’ prayer isn’t heresy. To the contrary, it reflects an honest reading of Scripture, not to mention respect for church history and acknowledgement of the church’s brokenness today.

Breaking God’s heart

Among its many virtues, the New Testament is honest—unflinchingly so. Acts records discord among the earliest Christians. The Apostle Paul’s letters, particularly to the Corinthian and Galatian churches, reverberate with the pain of division. Not coincidentally, Paul urged the Philippian church toward unity when he admonished, “... work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Sadly, the story of every generation reeks with reports of infighting, animosity and downright hatred among people who bear Christ’s name. Surely, we have broken God’s heart with every turn of malice, bitterness and recrimination.

Worse, Christian acrimony and animosity have driven—and continue to drive—unbelievers away from Jesus’ deep and unconditional love. How often have we heard people reject the claims of the Christ because of the actions of his followers? Although Mahatma Gandhi found Jesus compelling, he could not accept Christianity because of the unloving actions of Christians.

More immediately, visit almost any faith-related website and read the comments. You’ll see ample evidence Christian anger and infighting continue to repel people from Jesus. Maybe you’ve heard similar arguments from neighbors, co-workers, even family.

Millions of people cannot believe Jesus loves them because they have not seen love expressed in the lives of Christians they know.

Will God answer Jesus' prayer for Christian love and unity? The fate of the world depends upon it.

This Holy Week, the world—and people in our own communities—desperately need to experience undeniable evidence of the power of Jesus' love. May it start with Christian unity.

Painful rifts

Yes, some chasms are deep. Catholics and Protestants. Evangelicals and Mainliners. Pro-homosexual marriage and anti-homosexual marriage. One kind of Baptist and another kind of Baptist.

Other rifts are painful but not so deep, not so wide. Congregations in the same community created because of a split. Individual churches divided by worship, or ordination, or whether to relocate, or lesser things. Fellow Christians, even families, conflicted for good reason and not-so-good reason.

On Easter, Jesus rose from the grave, defeating evil and overcoming death. For 2,000 years, Christians have believed such power is available to Jesus' followers. That power is strong enough to move us to love one another.

Surely God will answer Jesus' prayer—in our hearts, in our lives.