



Family Worship Experience for June 26

Topic: The Witness the World Needs

Scripture: John 17: 20-23

Focus Verse: "I'm in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me."

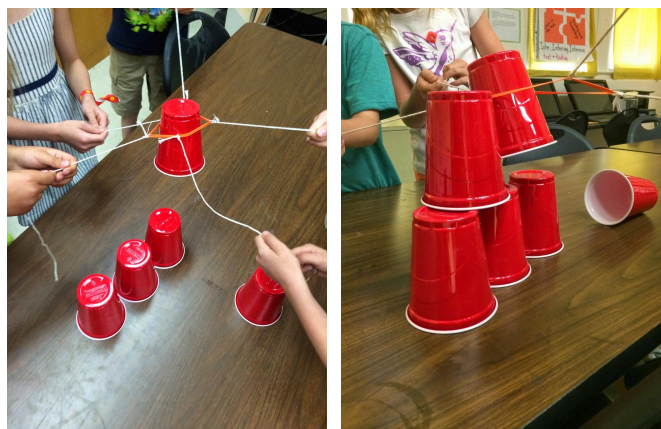
Family Activity:

Supplies Included:

- 6 Red Plastic Cups
- String
- Rubber Band

Instructions:

As a table use the rubber band and strings provided in your kit to complete the 2 challenges by stacking the 6 cups into the designs shown in the photos on the back of this paper. In order to complete this challenge, each person at the table can only touch their string. No touching the rubber band, no touching the cup, and no touching other group members' strings. Working together in unity with clear communication is so important in order to reach this goal. We all experience division in our lives, but God wants us to work together to build his Kingdom, even when it is difficult. When we do this, God's love is shared with the world.



Family Discussion Questions:

- Where do you see or experience division in your life?
- What are some ways you can work to overcome that division and create unity?
- What was it like to try and stack the cups using the strings and rubber band? What are some things that make working for unity in the face of division difficult?
- How do Christians living in unity and loving one another show God to others?



***Tip - when everyone pulls on their string the rubberband opens wider, and vice versa**



Devotion:

I'm going to do what I always do when sharing a final message among a congregation I have served, which is to share what is on my heart. I want you to know, though, that as I reflected on my time here, I realized that this message is one that God has been working in me for a decade or more.

In seminary, I made a conscious decision to pursue my ordination in the United Methodist Church (as opposed to some other denomination). I made this decision for two reasons. First, because of what we believe about God's grace, and second because the United Methodist Church is a "big tent" church – this is a church where everyone is welcomed at the table, where people can think differently about a lot of different things, but still come together in their belief in Christ and their desire to serve in his name. When I was ordained in 2009, it was in the sure and certain knowledge that I was in the right place.

And I still believe I am. The thing of it is, though, we United Methodists aren't quite as United as we used to be (or at least as I thought we were). The "big tent" doesn't feel so big anymore. Division seems to be the order of the day. What's saddest to me about this, though, is that is really a reflection of the wider society. There is division everywhere. And it's not just minor differences; we are all aware of the fractures in our world. Every day we see evidence of the deep, insurmountable chasms between people, and families, and communities, and parties, and countries. Division is so prevalent now that it's overwhelming to think about coming together on just about anything.

Then, in the midst of the division that pervades our lives, these words from Jesus, "I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me." Christ lifts up this prayer that his disciples will be one, just as Jesus is one with the Father, so that the world will know Christ. Let's put that another way – Christ says right here that the way the world will know him is by the unity of his followers. Are we convicted yet???

Friends, I can't tell you how many times in my years of local church leadership that I have watched all the infighting and thought to myself, what are we doing? We who follow Christ have got to stop feeding all the division. It's not like we're only divided politically, or societally, or even culturally. Our churches are divided, too. Look how many different denominations and Christian churches there are! Look at the division within the United Methodist Church right now. Look at the disagreements we are having even in this congregation, right now! What are we doing? How can the world see and know Christ when they look at Christ's church today?

At the point in John's gospel where we read this morning, Jesus has gathered his disciples in the Upper Room for a final meal, even as he continues to teach them and pray for them. Here, his prayer is that they will be one as he and the Father are one. It's rather interesting that the unity of followers would be one of his big wishes as he faced his own death. When John penned his gospel, were Jesus' followers already

experiencing division? Was being “one” a challenge for that community? Or could Jesus tell that this would be an ongoing problem? We don’t really know for sure, but whatever the reason for Jesus’ words here, it’s clear that this was and still is a much-needed prayer.

But at the same time, we need to understand that Jesus’ prayer was for unity, not uniformity. This isn’t really about oneness of opinion. In the words of Methodist founder, John Wesley, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” Jesus doesn’t suggest that unity will come through doctrine. Instead, he tells us, it will come through sharing in God through Jesus. We love God in Christ Jesus and put our whole trust in him, and as God’s love fills us, it overflows into the world around us. Even if we cannot think alike, surely we Christians can love alike? Even though we may not be of one mind, can we not still be of one heart? This is what I want for the church more than anything right now. And by my estimation, this is the witness the world needs from Christians more than any other. This world so desperately needs us to live as one in God’s mighty and freely given love.

Next month, I will begin to worship with a different congregation – notably, it will be the first time that my immediate family will be part of the same congregation – ever. I’m excited for this time we will finally be able to share as a family. And though Owen and I will no longer be a part of this congregation, the task, wherever we may be, remains the same for each of us: To be “perfectly one” so that “the world will know” Christ our Savior. May it be so, friends. May it be so.

Virtual Family Worship Experience:

If you are joining us virtually, please take a photo and share your experience on our closed Jones Memorial United Methodist Church Facebook groups before next Sunday!