

## Sermonette

On the occasion of the WARC/REC Uniting General Council  
19 June 2010  
Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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The Lutheran World Federation

### John 17: 20 - 23

*'I ask not only on behalf of these,  
but also on behalf of those  
who will believe in me through their word,*

*that they may all be one. As you, Father, 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.*

*The glory that you have given me I have given them,  
so that they may be one, as we are one,*

*I in them and you in me,  
that they may become completely one,  
so that the world may know that you have sent me  
and have loved them even as you have loved me.'*

### ***“Sorry I have no other plans.”***

My dear Sisters and brothers in Christ, our meditation this morning is based on the “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus in which he prayed specifically for Unity among his disciples. The Gospel accounts bear witness to the fact that his ministry and spiritual formation were centered in prayer. And this particular prayer was offered immediately after the last Passover meal that he celebrated with the twelve disciples. However it is not clear whether the Gospel writer John was within listening distance at the time Jesus rendered this prayer. Be that as it may it is not my intention to split your meditation attention by pursuing details of academic nature at this time.

A careful study of both *content* and *method* of what and how Jesus prayed brings us to the conclusion that 1) prayer be it individual or communal is an intimate conversational way of speaking to God sincerely believing that God hears one’s prayers. His prayers are 2) deeply rooted in ***Faith*** and marked by ***trust*** because without both ***Faith*** and ***trust*** such speaking or conversation ***is anything*** but prayer; 3) in prayer we bring to God issues of personal concern closest to our hearts. In this *High Priestly Prayer* the closest concern to Jesus’ heart is not himself; even though he was faced with eminent arrest and crucifixion. The central preoccupation of his prayer was the ***Unity*** of his disciples.

He petitions God to “gift” the disciples with a model of Unity that entwines God, Son and the disciples. It is unity that is based on ***trust***. The Rev William H, Morley quotes an ancient legend in

which Jesus arrives in heaven and the angel Gabriel was curious to know what *strategic plans*, if any, Jesus had made for his work to continue. Jesus happily informed him that he had left everything in the hands of his disciples. “What! did you say disciples?” replied the shocked Gabriel. “Yes, the disciples, Peter, Thomas and the rest,” replied Jesus. “And if that fails?” asked Gabriel. And Jesus replied, “*Sorry I have no other plans.*”

In this ancient legend Gabriel is depicted as making a friendly suggestion for Jesus to develop plan “B” in case things do not work out as foreseen. Yes Jesus had made no alternative arrangements because he trusted God. He was fully aware of the challenges the disciples were to encounter in due course. This is the reason why he prayed for them. Without underestimating the difficulties that lay ahead he prayed that God may set them apart for the sake of God’s mission; a mission that engages people from different cultures and nations; though distinct are one in purpose, love and action.

Today we are gathered here in Grand Rapids for a historic moment in the life of the Ecumenical movement. This uniting General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Reformed Ecumenical Council is a visible manifestation of *unity* which Christ willed and prayed for. While I do not know the length of time the two church families took to come this far. We are moved by what has been achieved through the ceaseless prayers of the church. It is common experience that when churches move towards visible unity such developments are shrouded by all kinds of fears, doubts and anxieties. And yet we should recognize that church unity is neither about us nor is it the result of the work of some “Theological Rocket Scientists”. It is the work of Jesus the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep from every nation and lays down his life for them, “*so that there will be one fold and one shepherd*”.

Sisters and brothers in Christ coming from every continent let us be grateful to God for calling us through his Son Jesus Christ to visible unity. He has left everything about the continuation of his work in our hands. He has *no other plans*.

To the two church families soon to unite, may you when asked the question, “have you made plan B in case the venture into unity does not last?” Let your simple and straightforward reply be “*Sorry we have no other plans by the grace of God.*” AMEN