

## 2017 Susquehanna Annual Conference Friday Morning Bible Study

*Rev. Dr. Jaime Clark-Soles*

One of the real blessings as any Annual Conference are the opportunities to be fed spiritually. This year, we once again have the privilege of being nourished and encouraged by the word of God. Our guest speaker this morning is the Rev. Dr. Jaime Clark-Soles. She is the professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology, a Southern Methodist University. She is an ordained American Baptist pastor. Dr. Clark-Soles is a ----- university, and Yale University for both her Master of Divinity and her PhD.

Our conference theme is based on Jesus' priestly prayer in John 17. Dr. Clark-Soles was immediately identified as the person who would be most qualified, resourceful, and helpful to come and address the Susquehanna Annual Conference. Her teaching specialties include Johannine literature, New Testament ethics, and preaching the New Testament. She has done research on the Gospel of John, the use, and authority of Scripture, and the Bible in the emergent and post-modern church.

Dr. Clark-Soles has written several publications and books. I am sure that after her Bible study you might consider reading more about her exciting work through her publications.

I would like you to know that she is the New Testament editor for the Common English Bible Women's Bible. They are available at Cokesbury in Cocoa Rooms 4 and 5. There are a limited number of books that she has written that she brought with her, and they are available for sale at the Courtesy Desk.

Finally, perhaps the best recommendation that I can offer this morning is that one of our current pastors, who is doing her PhD. work at Perkins, wrote me about how well respected and appreciated Dr. Clark-Soles is by the students and fellow faculty at Perkins. Rev. Natalia Cherry said how blessed the Annual Conference will be by Dr. Clark-Soles being here with us. Indeed, what Dr. Clark-Soles shares with us will be a gift to laying a solid, biblical, and theological foundation of our common journey for such a time as this.

Please, would you welcome Rev. Dr. Jaime Clark-Soles, our Bible study teacher.

Thank you, Bishop, I appreciate it.

Good morning, everyone. It is my pleasure to be here. I just asked Tom if you ordered "Victory in Jesus" for me, because you know I am a Baptist? I'm sure you did, whether you knew it or not. What a beautiful was to start the morning, a song clearly beloved by you as well, and not just Baptists. It's great to be here, and I appreciate the hospitality I have already received. You are typical Methodists: Warm, welcoming, feeding me, giving me lots of candy. The number of

times when I've been walking around just looking at the displays and had people ask can I help you, do you need anything, has been really impressive. It's just another day with Methodists, as far as I can tell.

Let me begin by bringing you formal greetings from Dean Craig Hill and Perkins School of Theology. Craig Hill is our new dean. And I want to let you know there are all kinds of fantastic, exciting things going on at Perkins. All kinds of innovative programs and new directions. So, I want to direct your attention, Tom, where can the find the materials? So, Tom is going to have those materials at the Courtesy Desk. There are some pamphlets and some cards you can fill out. If you are thinking about continuing your education in any way, we'd love to have you at Perkins.

I have heard great things about your conference. I have friends from this conference, and, as you just mentioned Natalia Cherry, It's funny she wrote to you, because I was going to give her a shout out. So if she is representative of the people you are raising up for leadership in your conference, you are doing extremely well. Natalia is providing all kinds of fantastic leadership in our community.

It's also the case that I want to thank the bishop for the invitation and I want to thank Tom. Again, if most of you are like Tom, if you are as warm and funny and smart, then I am probably going to stay longer than this afternoon, because you are a fun group of people. It's been wonderful already to be here.

I want to give you a little bit of context for our study today. The bigger context, of course, is our society as a whole. There is a lot of interest these days in unity and in one-ness. As you know, I've been called to come and speak on John 15 for a variety of denominations that are working toward unity. I am not sure there has been more unity after I've left or not, but I am willing to give it a try.

If you know **Richard Rohrer (spelling?)** – how many of you know Richard Rohrer? A lot of people are reading of Richard Rohrer now. You see our scientist who are working on unified field theory. And not only that, how about this, a theory of everything. There is this surge and interest in unity overall. So I have been praying for you and I hope you have been praying for me in these weeks leading up to this. In preparation, I've had lots of conversations with friends across denominations, including my own Sunday school class, so I also bring you formal greetings from Royal Lane Baptist Church, of which I am a member. They said to tell you, I had our class do John 17 on Sunday. I'm not the actual Sunday school teacher of that class, but I told them I'm coming here and I wanted to ponder John 17 with them. And here is the word from my Baptist Sunday school class: They said to tell you that Baptists refer to church conflict as church growth. So there you go. There's the word from the Baptists.

Again, when Tom called and asked me to come speak on behalf of the bishop on church unity, I thought, really? You're going to call a Baptist to come address you on church unity? I'm not too sure about your wisdom.

At any rate, one of the conversations I had this week was with a friend of mine who studied New Testament with me at Yale University. His name is Alan Hilton. He has founded the organization called A House United Movement to help folks develop practices and skills that build community across differences.

House United wants to make a Christian habit of bringing people together across difference for the common good. Because we are New Testament folks, part of our conversation was fixated on the biblical text. We talked about the fact that he's UCC, I'm Baptist. And we talked about the fact that most denominations have split. So I want you to know that Alan and I, and all the rest of us, are watching very closely and praying very hard that the Methodists can do a far better job of displaying the genius and the power of our tradition to do unity. So it's not just you, we're all watching and putting hope in you to do things differently than a lot of us have done. And so far, I have been impressed with the depth and the patience and the compassion and the perseverance that you all have shown. I work at a Methodist institution. My students are largely Methodist, and they are my heart, so it matters to me a lot that this goes well, because this is the church I am sending many of them into. So it's very personal for me. I've read all of your documents, all the statements from your bishops, and am praying ... actually, why don't I just ... just so you know I am actually praying ... there you go. Thank you, by the way, for including me in this. So that's the larger context, right, is our nation and the church universal around issues of unity.

But the context of our time together today comes from Bishop Park and his theme. I loved reading this letter, and his theme of Better Together. If you recall, did everyone get this letter? So you all recall this letter where the bishop says this year we will gather, ----- the overall quadrennial theme is Better Together. This year we will gather around the sub theme, Make Us One. We will spend time in reflection and prayer around Jesus' priestly prayer for the unity of his followers as recorded in John 17. And in fact, if you recall, the letter opens this way in italics at the top: "I pray that they will be one, Father, (from John 17:21) just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they all will be in us so that the world will believe that you have sent me." And then from your Great Thanksgiving: "By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet."

In his prayer in John 17, Jesus focuses on various aspects of unity. And he's not the only one in the New Testament who cares about it. So the question becomes, why is this important to our New Testament authors? What did they mean by it when they talk about unity? And what are the promises and pitfalls of trying to make their dream of unity a reality here and now?

You should all have a handout. You should have a handout of the text of John 17. You also should have ... do they have a copy, Tom, of the other Scriptures with Ephesians and all of that? I want to just quickly give you an example so that you don't take my word for it when I say throughout the New Testament this is a theme the authors are concerned about. When I say that, I teach my students to say where is that in the text? When someone says "throughout the

Bible ..." OK. Where is that in the text? So in case you are sitting there saying, OK, Jamie, where is that in the text, well, I'm glad you asked.

So Ephesians 4:1, for instance. Listen to this; Ephesians 4:1 and following: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called to the one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all." So you see love and you see unity.

How about Philipians 2:2 and following. Paul says, "Make my joy complete. Be of the same mind, having the same love. Being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave."

First Peter 3:8. We don't always hang out on 1 Peter, but 1Peter 3:8 says this: "Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind."

Mark 12:28: "One of the Scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?'" And you all know the answer to this. "Jesus answered, 'The first is ... (what we call the **Schmah (spelling?)**) Hear, Oh, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." Unity and love.

I actually did not plan this. I ran a search (my research assistant ran a search). And in looking at themes of unity in the New Testament, these passages came up, and it just so happens in each passage here that I've read about unity, it contains love. So somehow unity and love and inseparable. And that's across the New Testament. We expect it in the Gospel of John, who was obsessed, by the way, with the language of love. Obsession with love is a feature of this Gospel. The author uses the language of philo, or philetto. The author uses the language of Agape and the verb Agapao, over seventy times, by the way. In fact, one of the things this Gospel is famous for is, if in the Synoptic Gospels, Peter is the main disciple, who is the main disciple, the kind of heroic or paradigmatic person we are supposed to follow in the Fourth Gospel? The beloved disciple, exactly. And what is fascinating to me is, the beloved disciple is actually never named.

Tradition identifies the beloved disciple as John, but the author never ever indicates who the beloved disciple is. Why is that? When you are reading these passages where the beloved disciple appears, what is the rhetorical effect of that disciple never being named? It's us. It leaves space for us. I like the Synoptics, they're great. And I am happy to come talk about those

as well, but today we are on John. And that is one of the reasons, I think, that John is so powerful and draws people in. In a way, if you say, oh, look, Peter did all these great things, or, alternatively, wow, Peter, really? I think I could have done a little bit better than that. At any rate, in a way, you can relate, and that's fine. But in a way, it keeps you on the outside looking at some stuff that happened a couple of millennia ago. Whereas, this beloved disciple piece is very inviting and draws us in to recognize we are that beloved disciple.

I want to point something out about this kind of love that the Gospel of John cares about. It's not just a head trip, it's not a kind of theoretical concept. It's a very intimate, very touchy, physically touchy, kind of love. For example, in John 1:18 ----- I have no idea why; I don't know why it does this, but in 1:18, it talks about Jesus being in the Father's bosom, sometimes in English. But the word is "kolpos." The word only occurs twice, technically it occurs three times, because it occurs twice in Chapter 13. But it occurs in two stories or places in the Gospel. It's the word for bosom or chest. It's where your mom or dad holds you when you are really little. It's the closest, kind of most tender, kind of holding that you can find. And for some reason, the New RSV says close to the Father's heart. But it's not heart; we have a word for that. That's "cardia," and this isn't that. And the reason this is important is because that occurs in 1:18, and then the only other place the word occurs is in John 13, which is ... what is happening in John 13? A lot. But happens there first, Bible quiz, the foot washing. Look at this, I love it. So there is the foot washing and then it moves into the Last Supper, so called. And in there, we find the beloved disciple reclining upon Jesus' kolpos. So Jesus is in God's kolpos in John 1. That kind of very tender embrace. And in John 13, that is where the beloved disciple, un-named, you and me, is there with Jesus.

Now your New RSV will place the, and all translations that I have found, I haven't looked at all of them, but they will place the beloved disciple reclining next to Jesus. But it's very clear in the Greek that he's reclining upon Jesus' bosom. And that makes a difference. So this is a certain kind of love that we are dealing with in this Gospel of John. To which we should turn. So unity in love go hand-in-hand. And again, I didn't plan that fact when I picked these other passages from the larger New Testament context.

As you can see, the theme that the bishop has chosen in crucial throughout the New Testament. We are going to focus just on John 17. It's also the case that I am not just trying to plug my book, but I did not provide you an outline, but if you ... much of what I am saying but not all of it is in that book. The little "Reading John for Dear Life" that came out in the fall. If you are a not-taking kind of person and you need to go back and get the outline, you can see it in there. Otherwise, I am just going to forge ahead.

I do want to say one thing about this book. I've written a number of books so far, but this is the one that has my soul really in it. And part of the reason is the cover art is actually a piece of artwork by my mother. She works in glass. And this is a piece that I have always loved of hers that I now own. I didn't grow up in church, and my family is not a church-going kind of family. So this is really special to me, because this is kind of the one place where my religious world intersects with my Mom's world.

John 17 falls in the section of the Gospel that scholars call the farewell discourse. Taking a peek at the structure of John, this is probably a reminder for many of you, but this is the way we break down the Gospel of John. John 1:1 through 18 is known as the prologue. 1:19 through Chapter 12 is known as the Book of Signs. And that's because in the Gospel of John we only have seven or eight, depending upon how you count, signs. And they all take place by the end of Chapter 12. We don't have any miracles. By that I mean, the word for miracles, if I had a giant whiteboard up here, the word for miracles is "dynamis." It's where we get the word "dynamite." And dynamis means a deed of power, which gets translated into English as "miracle." Never once does that word appear in the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John where you see these wonderful events, they are called "symaya" (spelling??), which means "signs." The signs point to something. And John wants us to be really careful and not get caught up with wonder working and sensationalistic Christianity that depends on the extraordinary to elicit belief in us. We shouldn't need the extraordinary. The ordinary is infused with God. So the Gospel calls these signs, and they are all done by Chapter 12.

Chapters 13 to 20 are known as the Book of Glory. So Jesus' crucifixion is considered an exultation in the Gospel of John. He will not call out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" in the Gospel of John. He is God, and so it wouldn't make a lot of sense. So what happens is that in Chapter 13, he pulls his disciples away into the Farewell Discourse, 13 to 17. And the word "glory" and "glorification" appear 48 times, and almost all of them are in Chapters 13 and following.

The first occurrence of it you know very well. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." That were tabernacled among us. Again, the word there is -----, which is the word for tabernacle. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory as of a father's only son." You all don't even need Bibles, you like a walking Bible memorization. That is not true; we all need our Bible. That way hyperbole.

So 13 to 20 is the Book of Glory. So 13 to 17 is the Farewell Discourse, where our passage is situated. Then 18 to 20 you have the passion, resurrection. Twenty-one is an epilogue, so to speak, a second ending. So the Gospel of John has two endings. If you go to 20:31, you get a first ending; these things are written that you may believe, and that through believing you .... That you believe Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and that by believing you have life in his name. and then at the end of 21 you have another ending. If all the things that Jesus did were written, the world could not contain it. So, this is the context. We're in the Farewell Discourse.

So talking about unity in John, the word "one," which is -----, is used three hundred forty-five times in the New Testament. In John, that language appears thirty-two times, from start to finish, literally.

So here is what I want to do, because I want to make sure we're all engaged here. Would you please take out your John 17 passage. I'm sorry, but I'm a professor, so I do not feel comfortable if we don't have at least one assignment in our time here. So here you go. I'm not

going to give you a lot of time to do this, but in true professor form, you don't have a lot of time but I want you to do a lot of things. Here they are: First, I want you to skim through, and I want you to highlight any time you see the word "one." Second, I want you to highlight or circle wherever you see the word "love." Third, any other words or phrases that are relevant to our theme. So if you were standing up here doing this, what would you want to highlight? I assume you will go back to your own parishes and own churches and do this exact thing. And then this is interesting. Jesus prays for our protection. I want you to jot down a couple of ideas. What do you think we need protecting from? We understand he says protect them from the evil one. But in detail, what do you think we or you, I won't ask you to say this publicly necessarily, what do we need protection from? Take three minutes to do that.

I am going to look at some of the other places John uses unity language. In other words, I want to take a look at what comes before our passage. And I hope that having just reviewed John 17 yourself that you'll see connections between the things I am about to show you and that passage. The question becomes, how has the author prepared us for what comes in John 17?

First, we'll put up the Shammah, Deuteronomy 6:4. This is quite famous, right, -----  
Israel Adoni El ----- Adoni ----- . And the Septuagint -----  
----- Israel ----- . (Here Jamie is speaking Hebrew, and I don't know how to translate what she said.) "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Jesus is a Jew. John is a Jew. The author is a Jew. This is part of the daily recitation. This is a fundamental foundational, what you say every single day as a Jewish person. So Jesus, of course, walked around with this concept in his head. Something I want to point out, especially for American Christians, especially Baptists, I mean, you all are at least better about this than Baptists, but, you haven't arrived. But notice that Israel is addressed as "one." The whole nation is considered one. There is no such thing for a Jew then or now, by the way, and technically for Christians, there is no such thing as being a Christian on your own. It's not a thing anywhere in the New Testament. You are only Christian in community. I guess as Baptists, we are definitely the worst. We're like, you know, we come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, you know, and we tarry there, and that's great, but you have to remind us to go back and be with other people. Remembering that we cannot be Christian in isolation. And if you are a Jew, or a Christian, just recite the Shammah and you're a member. We're damned together or we're save together. It's not up for grabs. So they are a people.

It's also the case, I'll show you in a second when we get to John 14, so let's go in order. First, what undergirds everything is the Shammah, God is unified. God is one. This of course has Trinitarian implications as well for Christians. Starting then with that as the case. The Gospel of John loves the Old Testament. How does the Gospel of John start out? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Those are obviously the opening words of .... In the beginning of John, but those are opening words of Geneses. Another fun exercise to do would be just to walk through the whole Gospel of John and show all of the allusions to the Old Testament. For sure the Shammah is in there. John 1:3-5 .... "All things came into being through him. And without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was Life, and the Life was the Light of all people. The Light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 10:16 ... "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice so there will be one flock, one shepherd." There are different sheep, but there is one shepherd, one flock, whether we like that or not. John 10:27-30 ... "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Next, is John 11:50-52. This is Caiaphas doing his Caiaphas thing. "You do not understand that is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Now he didn't say this on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.

Then how about John 12:32 .... "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself."

Then finally, and I didn't put this on a slide, but something to note, John 14:1, moving into the Farewell Discourse, this is not obvious in your English translation, but John 14:1, if you know the verse, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," it will say in your English translation. But in fact, it says, "Do not let your ya'all's, plural, so ya'all's heart." And I think your translation does not say that. And that's a very, very different thing, to not have all your individual hearts trouble, but again, Jesus is a Jew. John is a Jew. And when they think of this, they think of it as one heart beating together. So that's John 14:1.

Moving in then to the Farewell Discourse. It begins this way: "Now before the Festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." That's how it starts off. We have just moved from Chapter 12 where Mary, the sister of Lazarus, not Mary Magdalene, and not a prostitute. There is no prostitute who anoints Jesus, and Mary Magdalene never anoints Jesus. But that's a different lecture for a different day. This is Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and she has just anointed Jesus. That's the last act before we bridge over; she's a bridge into the Farewell Discourse, and this is how it begins.

In the prayer John 17, Jesus has pulled the disciples away, kind of like this, away for a time and for study, in Chapter 17. Chapter 17 concludes the ----- Farewell Discourse. The prayer is divided into three parts. I want to do this as three aspects of unity. If you will take your passage out you can follow along with me. So the Farewell Discourse concludes with Jesus' farewell prayer, where Jesus prays to God in the presence and on behalf of his followers. Three things are prominent, and none of them is new in John. Unity, glorification, and knowledge. The reason I say he prays in the presence of his disciples is, because if I just said to you, if you think of Jesus praying in the synoptics, I'm guessing you might think of him as praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he is all alone? It's really important to realize he's praying in front of them and on behalf of them.

First he prays for his own glorification. This has to do with Jesus' own unity with the Father. These are verses 1 through 8. After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me. And they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you. For the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them, and know in truth that I came from you. And they have believed that you sent me." So that's the first part of the prayer. Jesus' own unity with the Father.

The second part of the prayer is in 9 through 19. And here Jesus prays for the disciples. So what I want you to get out of this is, Jesus acted in unity with God and did his job, or his work, so the disciples benefit from it. Now those disciples are to act in unity with Jesus so that future believers will benefit. "I am asking on their behalf. I'm not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one."

If we had time or if you were doing this with your own group, I would have people think about and say what they need protection from. Does anybody want to volunteer anything? Just blurt it out. Evil. Ok. That which divides; alienating things. What else? Fear. I think fear is a really, really big one. On that note, by the way, another theme and word Jesus speaks a lot in the Gospel of John is "peace." Why do you need peace? What's the peace the antidote to? Fear, right? So the repetition of peace, especially in the Farewell Discourse, this is what happens, he's getting ready to leave, and whatever it is, he knows they need peace. And he says I give it to you not as the world gives. It's a very different kind of peace that does not actually depend on circumstances around you. It depends on the fact that you are beloved by God. You are the beloved disciple. The rest is just kind of details. I agree, fear.

Despair. Doubt about God's care or God's involvement in the world around us. Disconnection from the vine. In Chapter 15 as part of the Farewell Discourse, we have the vine and the branches. God is the gardener. Jesus is the vine. And we are the branches.

So he says, "While I was with them I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost, except the one destined to be lost, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Again, on another day we could talk about the doctrine of election, etc. This isn't that day. "But now I am coming to you and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word and the

world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify myself so that they may also be sanctified in truth.”

The third part of the prayer falls in verses 20 to 26. And this is a prayer for future believers. Now we are to act in unity with the disciples, so that the whole world benefits. And the Greek word for world is “kosmos,” which we obviously get the word in English, “cosmos” from. For them, it’s the world they knew, but for us, it is really more appropriate to use the word cosmos. Because our world is bigger. It’s really the whole cosmos. Always the life of the cosmos is in view.

Verses 20 to 26 ... “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word.” And that’s us, of course. “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 loved them, even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus works for integration at all levels. So integration of the self. If you think to Chapter 21 and the rehabilitation of Peter after he has denied Jesus three times, you see integration of the self. You see concern about integration of the community, hence the Farewell Discourse that we are looking at. And integration again of the whole cosmos.

As I said, the disciples are taking time away to get instruction and knowledge from and about Jesus, just as we are. They are taking time to be together, just like we are. They are taking time to be sustained. You have this language of knowledge. We see knowledge. But this is a different kind of knowledge. This is the knowing that comes between you and the people who know you best; your loved ones. This is the kind of knowledge that is based on love, not a head trip. They go hand in hand.

Last night I was having dinner with Beth Jones, and she was telling me about the studies you did, the Summits, were they called, where you gathered folks together and had conversations about gender. I was very struck by a comment that she made when I was asking her so how is unity going to work. What are the practical strategies? What’s your plan? She answered it very briefly. If you want the answer, you can ask me afterward. I’ll give you a laminated card. She’s the one --- she knows right here in the front row. What she said really struck me. And that is,

(I'm not going to get it exactly correct) but it was the realization that however unity is going to come, it's not going to be a matter of compromise. You don't move forward just on compromise, but you'll be moving forward based on love.

Those are two very different things. Love is the higher aim, actually. And the things Christians should be going for. Compromise is kind of a bare minimum. It's not infused with the highest genius of our tradition. I just love that. Unity is not based on compromise, which is what we typically default to. Well, we just need to compromise. No, we need to actually go further and work toward love. And we do that, of course, by hanging out with Jesus. So what does it mean to know Jesus and to know God? In part it means spending time. I'm going to steal from my book on this. How does John define eternal life? It's being in a relationship with God and Christ. What John calls "knowing them." And it's available in its entirety now. You remember that Jesus knew everything about the Samaritan woman that we already learned in John 2:25. That he knows what's in everybody, and has no need for anybody to tell him anything about anybody. That's kind of intense language.

So this is the deepest kind of knowing. It's the kind of knowing you find in Psalm 139. So when is said and done, what deeper desire exists than to know and be truly known. To understand and to be truly understood. To love and be truly loved. According to John, this is the meaning of life. And I think this is what you were getting at, Beth, last night, this kind of knowledge. This Gospel specializes in knowing language and loving language, because they go together. Which can be counterintuitive, I think, to us. We sometimes assume the opposite. We take great pains, in fact, to hide true knowledge of ourselves, since we assume that the more someone knows the real me, the less love they will have for me. As knowledge goes up, love goes down. If we want love to remain high, then we better work hard to pass ourselves off as loveable.

John takes issue with such moves. Can you really deeply love that which you do not know? Knowing depends upon authentic relationship and regular encounter with the beloved. Is it any wonder that four great examples of discipleship in John are the Samaritan woman in Chapter 4, the blind man in Chapter 9, Mary in Chapter 12, and Thomas, of all people, in Chapter 19? What they have in common is that they stay in relationship and have on-going conversation and encounter with Jesus. And because of that, they understand that he is the source of their lives and he loves them like no other. This leads them to worship him and testify to others about him.

Mary is described as one whom Jesus loves in 11:5, and John makes it clear that she, her brother Lazarus, and her sister Martha regularly spend time with Jesus, Thomas may be a less obvious hero, but he is a hero nonetheless in this Gospel. He sticks with Jesus even though he discerns that trouble lies ahead. He asked questions when he doesn't understand; he's not gullible or prone to flights of fancy; but he's willing to believe when confronted with raw glory. Doubting Thomas is the one, in fact, who says "My Lord and my God." On the basis of all of this, Thomas comes to know Jesus fully.

I just wanted to take a moment there to emphasize. So the knowledge piece is not just know a bunch of stuff. The knowledge has to do with reminding us of the importance of the vertical relationship. Yes, we're dealing with church conflict in all of our denominations. And that's kind of a horizontal issue. How are we going to get along with each other? And you're Methodists, so you are really good at doing the part we're about to get to. Go out and do things for the world. Be the church on mission. Transform the world. You all are good at that. You have social principles. You're motivated. You're not navel-gazing like sometimes some of us; i.e., us Baptists. Sometimes were like, wow, lets read our Bible. There's a lot of great stuff in here. But sometimes the urge can be lets get saved. And it's very individual. You all do a brilliant job of being out there actually changing the world.

So it's just time to take a moment though to remember the importance of the whole vertical thing. The unity is going to come. The unity is only based on the fact that we are beloved by God. That's the fundamental fact of John and of the Gospel. We are God's beloved. That is where the unity lies. And it's not in the future; it's already the case because of what Jesus came and did. We are already unified because Jesus and God are unified, and everything belongs to them. So it's already done, we just have to act like it's true. It's not like we're achieving unity; we have unity. But that unity is only based on the fact that we are all the beloved of God.

In that vein, I want to share a video. Take a moment in our Bible study to kind of pay attention to this vertical aspect. I love your theme of praying. I love this, because first of all, Jesus is praying, so that models prayer. Whatever it is, unity is going to depend on a heck of a lot of prayer. You're already doing that. And to whom are you praying? You're praying to the gardener God. To Jesus, the vine, of which we are the branches. So in that vein, I want to play for you a video by one of my friends. Her name is Allison (**Don't know how to spell Allison's last name – Vermilskercheon?**) And she does spoken word poetry. So I am going to share with you her original composition called "I Am the Vine."

Amen? The call to unity. When Jesus prays for something; when Jesus prays for anything, it is not magic, and it's not just a wish. Rather, Jesus wills it. And if Jesus wills it, it will be done. Thus, if he prayed this prayer for us, it is a done deal. Now we just have to act like it is true. Again, our unity is founded upon our beloved-ness, period.

The disciple is called the beloved disciple, not the correct disciple. That would be a really fun exercise. We don't have time, but if you are doing this back when you go home, I would have people fill in the blank 'notice that the disciple's called the beloved disciple, not the (fill in the blank), and have people fill in the blank with things that it's not, that we seem to think that it is. The correct disciple, the pure disciple, etc.

So we thrive, so why should we bother with unity? I'm going to talk about two reason here. First, because we thrive as individuals and communities because we are living the lives we are created to live. Spiritual lives that are by design embodied and communal. This is why. These are the rewards of unity.

We have big words for it, like, incarnational or ecclesiological, but it means we are very much a part of God's created order, and the job is not to distance ourselves from the messiness of it all, but to jump in full-force. When you do, we'll wash your feet with a basin and a towel. So we have to do real, authentic, vulnerable life together.

In a different book that I wrote called "Engaging the Word," I said this: If the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, that is, if the Word of God came out of the birth canal of a woman's body, grew, ate, went to the bathroom, bathed, struggled against demons, sweated, wept, exalted, was transfigured, was physically violated, and rotted away in a tomb just before being gloriously resurrected, then the Bible must have flesh on it. If a valley of dry bones can live again, then bones and blood and bread and flesh and bodies should never be left behind when we are trying to understand the grime and glory of Scripture. Any interpretation that denounces the material created order, including our own bodies, should be suspect. From birth to death our bodies swell and shrink. They're wet with milk and sweat and urine and vomit and sex and blood and water, and wounds that fester and stink, and are healed and saved and redeemed and die and are resurrected. If you can't glory in, or at least talk about these things, these basic realities, in church while reading Scripture, then how can Scripture truly intersect with or impact life?

Second, we please God by fulfilling the charge to do greater works that Jesus himself did. In John 14:12, Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believe in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

Jesus does not say they will think greater thoughts, but they will do greater works." For the transformation of the world. This is what Methodists are about. God created it, redeemed it, and sustained it. Shouldn't we be in the same business?

That's great. Unity is wonderful. Wonderful things happen with it. What are the obstacles to unity? We could be here all day talking about that, so I am just going to whip through here kind of quickly, because I think there are as many reasons for us to avoid unity, in our minds, as there are people here today. We have lots of reasons why not; why not unity. Competition. A theology of scarcity verses a theology of abundance. We're too busy. We don't want the same things. We don't want to be in each other's business. We don't like conflict. We feel like we're compromising our principles to do so. And you all could expand this list. The bottom line is, it's complicated and it may cost us something. If we have a hundred reasons why we can't do unity, the Bible has a hundred examples of how we can.

Here I just want to mention two challenges of unity. First, as I just mentioned, a theology of scarcity versus a theology of abundance. And second, a theology that is fixated on dualisms.

The theology of scarcity is represented best by Judas in Chapter 12. So Mary is lavishly anointing Jesus' feet. It's ridiculous. It's excessive. It's wasteful. And what does Judas say? This is wasteful. Look, we could have taken that and given to the poor. In a way, by doing this lavish, extravagant thing, you're taking something away from someone else. And that is the language

of a zero sum gain. The notion that abundance over here and generosity and graciousness and giving is by definition a taking away from somewhere else. And it's not real. Go back and read Psalm 23. Does it say my cup is just full enough? My cup runneth over. Exactly. This is profligate grace. It's abundant, it's excessive. Think of the story of the Prodigal Son. The oldest son is a little put off by this kind of elaborate, wasteful, gracious reception of the Prodigal Son. So that's the first challenge, is that we tend to operate on a theology of scarcity. For me to give you something or grant you something, concede something, means somehow for me to lose something; have something taken away from me. So we don't want to be like Judas, we want to be like Mary.

The Farewell Discourse pulls them aside. If we're going to do unity, we have to do life together. And this means the most basic, dirty, scary, intimate parts of it. We have got to be vulnerable, and we have to be honest.

This is what I heard, Beth, from the exercises you all did together, you didn't solve the world's problems, but what you did is actually become vulnerable to one another. And somehow relationship and trust grew. You didn't go in just on principle. You didn't go in trying to persuade the other person. You went in and made yourselves vulnerable.

This means, of course, we're going to get our toes stepped on, and we're going to do some stupid, embarrassing things.

We see in the Farewell Discourse, for some of us, change is easy, and we welcome it. But some of us, we don't understand why, why does anybody have a problem with it? Change is great. Let's be innovative. But some of us feel fear and grief in the face of change, and need more time to adjust.

Others are resigned, like Thomas. Thomas is one of my favorite characters. They're like, oh, we're going to go up to Jerusalem. Thomas says let us go up to Jerusalem to die with you. I just love Thomas. Every time you read the Gospel of John from now on, whenever you read the parts about Thomas, think of the voice of Eeore. He's absolutely Eeore. He's like, let us go to Jerusalem, that we might die with him. Or, Jesus goes into this whole thing; you know the way where I am going. You know my Father. You know where I am going. And Thomas is like, we have no idea where you are going. No idea. So I love it. Then, of course, you know famously, well, unless I touch, you know. He's resigned, but he shows up. He's not optimistic, but he's there. And I just love that about Thomas.

At 14:31, Jesus says, "Rise, let us be going." And that's for people like me .... Yeah, let's go, right? But then notice Jesus actually takes three more chapters. He talks three more chapters before they actually get up and go.

So unity is the will of God. And it is the gift given by and through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is possible if we branches depend on Jesus who wills this very thing for us.

Then the second thing, we won't take time to go into, is the problem with dualism. We do everything as an either or. Why not more both and? You see this problem with the disciples themselves. We need less either or and more of embracing the both and.

Also notice that Jesus crosses borders all the time in the Gospel of John. He sends them out into the world to be boundary-crossers. He crosses every border that you can think of: ethnic, gender, you name it, he crosses it. Sometimes he seeks it out. And we can name examples of that, like the Samaritan woman, the man at the Pool of Bethesda. Sometimes he just engages it as he comes across it. But because he's done the work of preparation, he can be fruitful in that encounter. Think of the feeding of the five thousand, the healing of the centurion's son in Chapter 4.

So I would ask you to think about what dualisms still inhibit us, and what it would take to embrace the both and. We can list lots of things. The sacred and profane, body versus soul, religion and politics, white and black, charity versus justice, faith versus works, Christian versus not Christian, able-bodied versus non-disabled, etc. But the biggest one, really, is us versus them.

Every one of these are false, destructive dualisms that keep us acting more like Judas and less like Mary. We are called to be a missional church, and we can't do that unless we are involved in the most touchy, most vulnerable, most meaningful, most saving work that stands before us. If we are just a salon of sorts, a glorified book club, a group that gathers to bat around interesting, even controversial, ideas, a historical society whose chief aim is to protect our glorious heritage, then let us at least have the decency to stop calling ourselves a church. For Christ's sake, for starters. And for sure, let's stop calling ourselves a Christian church.

We are called for Christians teaching biblical faith, thus means teaching so that people know their identity as children of God. Are able to live their vocation as agents of God's Shalom in the world and follow Jesus into new times and new places. We are formed as we study the meanings of faith, and seek to live in mission to the wider world. That is a quote from a book I like very much that I recently blurbed, called, "Teaching the Biblical Faith," from Abingdon.

So this ends our time together. Here is what I want to say. I actually already had this here before you all had this beautiful .... That I was gifted with this. But I want to close.

Here's an exercise. When you go back home, we don't have time to do this in full right now, but do you want to put the slide up, Jason, of the exercise I would have you do as your professor? I do want you to take one minute and think about this exercise. I asked my students at the end of the semester, after a year together, I asked them this: If you had to choose a single verse or phrase from the Bible on which you would base your entire life's work as a minister or a scholar or activist or artist or whatever is true for you, what would that verse or phrase be, and why?

When I do this exercise with my students, I have many different colored markers. We have a giant white board, and we just write the verses all over the place. Then, of course, you can see

my students' personalities come out, because some of them want to have two and some of them want to have whole passages, etc. But we put these verses up there, and we recognize that as different as we are, we have different vocations. God has called and gifted us to do different things. We are different. We come in different colors, even, of markers and people.

But all of our favorite verses come from our Scriptures. We are unified. We don't have to talk each other out of our favorite verse to make them have our favorite or particular call. We do notice that we are all about the same God. We all want to please God, to be close to God, to love God and God's world, for whom Christ died.

So ends our time on John 17 for the moment. My friends, a cord of three strands is not easily broken, Ecclesiastes insists. So how much more so a cord of four strands. Believers are unified with God, Christ, the Spirit, and one another. Therefore, we are strong and equipped to do greater works than Jesus. There is no reason we can't just as effectively demonstrate and reveal God's love for everything in God's cosmos as did Jesus. This is an empowering word, to be sure. It is also a challenging word, because we cannot pretend to be waiting for something God has yet to provide before we get on with the work at hand. We cannot wring our hands and say, if only, if only. To be sure, the road will be rough enough that Jesus feels the need to offer prayers for our protection as we go. We know, then, that we are in good hands. We have all we need to testify to God's love in ways that will bring abundant, eternal life to all of creation. So rise. Let us be going. I pray God's blessings upon you as you go out in unity to be agents of deep and unifying change. Thank you.

Bishop Park: We are so richly blessed, nurtured, inspired, and indeed, what an awesome time we are privileged to have in God's presence to hear the word of God for the sake of our common journey toward oneness in Christ. And thanks be to God that I heard the word that unity and love goes together. And we are God's beloved disciples. Thanks be to God.