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St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
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Easter VII
John 17:20-26

I don't know about you, but when I was in sixth grade we were taught how to diagram sentences. Any of you remember that? Miss Emerson taught us about subject- verb- object, prepositional phrases that begin with "of," "over," and "under," words like that. Direct clauses, indirect clauses. Gerunds. Infinitives, never to be split.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John would have been Miss Emerson's joy and our undoing. Listen to portions of it again – here's one sentence: "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." Here's another: "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."

Diagram that.

You must remember that diagramming sentences is all about relationships – the relationship of one word to another, one phrase to another, one dependent clause to its subject. All the words relate.

And what *these* sentences of Jesus are all about is relationship. The relationship of Jesus the Son with God the Father, the relationship of the Creator with the disciples and those who believe, the relationship of Jesus with them, the relationship of them with the larger world – it's all about relationships.

"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 many know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." *Do you realize that that sentence is fifty-five words long? And it's still... all about relationships.*

And *we* are all about relationships. I in you, you in me, all of us in God and God in each of us. Whether you call it *ubuntu* or the Spirit of God, we are related. And I think we are very peculiar creatures in the church, because we are related not only through each other but through Christ – in Baptism, in the Eucharist, in the sharing of the water and the bread and the wine, and sometimes in overwhelming grief and sometimes in wondrous joy.

As you all must know by now, we have suffered a tragedy here at St. John's: One of our own, a young woman of fire and spirit and light, has met a very untimely death.Carolynn Cosan was killed in a car accident Friday afternoon. Her death touches us all.

I spent some time last evening with over a hundred teenagers who had gathered to grieve for Carolynn by candlelight. This is what I told them.

First, I told them that I do not believe that Carolynn's death is part of God's plan – at least not in the way some people would express it. That Carolynn is embraced by God's loving arms even as God weeps. I think of Derek, and Bruce, and Katie and Michael, and I believe that God grieves for them even as God has welcomed them into the Kingdom.

And we are all touched by their lives as we are all touched by their deaths.

Second, I warned them: Some adults, I said, might tell you to stop crying. They might try to diminish your sadness. *Don't let them*, I said. The grief of a teenager, or of a child, is no less real, no less valid, than the grief of an adult. Our culture too often tries to minimize emotion – especially the raw sort of emotion with jagged teeth that comes forth to cut our hearts. I say to heck with that. We need to give ourselves permission to weep, to wail, to collapse to the floor in a storm of anguish, to express our heartache in whatever way it comes forth. And nobody, *nobody*, can say that it's wrong, or inappropriate, or crazy.

I think of the teenagers clustered around me on the Cosan's backyard lawn, and I think, "They are too young to have this grief." And so we must embrace them with a special tenderness. Because they, too, are with us in community.

I talked about that. About how even though many of them didn't know each other – some were soccer buddies from Saginaw, some were classmates here in Mount Pleasant – even though they might not know each other, they were now part of a community. I called it The Community of Carolyn. And we, too, are now part of that community. The community of Carolyn, the community of Bruce, the communities of Michael and of Katie and of Derek.

Miss Emerson certainly could not have diagrammed that web of relationships.

This prayer of Jesus, which we listen in on, is an intimate conversation between Jesus and God. Now we listen in on one another's prayers all the time in church – I hear us say the Lord's Prayer, you hear me pray the Collect of the Day, we pray together the Eucharistic Prayer (even though I'm doing most of the talking). But those are public prayers, corporate prayers, prayers that we say together in community.

It doesn't happen very often that someone will hear my own private prayer. And that's what we're hearing – we are eavesdropping on Jesus and God.

And they're talking about *us*.

You may remember me talking about the jigsaw puzzles my grandmother used to have out on her dining room table. The pieces each have a bit of design on one side, and a drab grey or brown on the other. Each one is slightly different – the shape is different, this one has a knob that sticks out like a nose, this one looks more like Mickey Mouse; this one has a bit of leaf, this

one is definitely sky, another is a flower, or a piece of a thatch roof of some quaint English cottage.

And eventually, every piece relates to another one – or to several, actually. And eventually, every piece relates to the larger picture – the entire cottage, the whole tree in leaf, the blue sky skuddled with clouds. So while this one piece may *appear* to be an isolated design, it's not. And while you may *try* to fit a piece with an inconvenient knob into a piece with a slightly smaller hole, it's not going to work – one needs patience and perseverance, and the picture will come together.

I think that's the kind of oneness Jesus is talking about. A unity of design – God's design – made up of a variety of smaller, different designs, all coming together.

But instead of my fingers doing the joining of the pieces, it is God's love that joins them. Joins us. Joins all of us.

When we come together to worship, truly worship, we are led in a slow, patient discovery of being able to love people in their bizarre particularities, and see the beauty in those things, not the oddity of those things. Just as true friendship requires time and stretching and self-examination, and trust building, and vulnerability and time wasted doing nothing in particular. We are one in that we are all being forgiven together and loved together by the forgiving and loving Christ, and that discovery happens very slowly. But eventually, sometimes out of time, we become one.

The jigsaw puzzle begins to show a grand design, because all the pieces are bound together in the love of the Creator. It is that love that is the oneness, it is from that love that the oneness occurs.

What I mean, is that Jesus has prayed for us that we might love. Jesus has turned us over to the care of God. And it is up to us to make the best of it.

The very best of it.

Bringing the Kingdom of God closer, right here in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

Because we are each touched by the Other. Because our lives are intertwined. Because I carry you in me and God in you in me and you carry me in you and let's see Miss Emerson diagram that, too.

We must remember that we don't live in isolation: We live in God's loving embrace as one. Our relationships are intertwined in peculiar and beautiful and tragic ways.

And when a relationship is broken, God will find a way to re-bind us.

Through love.

Amen.