

“The Power of WE: 2019 Vision Sermon”
John 17:20-23

Introduction: Pg. [REDACTED].

Welcome... Today is Vision Sunday, the Sunday where I have the privilege of sharing where we want to spend our greatest focus and energy to continue growing as a vibrant church here in Greater Boston.

This year, we are asking God to help us to live...

THE POWER OF WE. The POWER OF WE is all about how we can be at our best together as a community of Jesus Christ.

From the start, I want to share some reasons I'm really excited about this...

1. This has always been our vision as a church. Our very first prayer card had the same words that are on the Vision card you received this morning ... **Philippians 1:27 - “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel . . . standing firm in *one spirit*, with *one mind* striving *side by side* for the faith of the gospel.”** Whether 4 then or the 400 who would call Redemption Hill their church home today, it has always been about accomplishing God’s business TOGETHER!
2. And this focus has immense potential to address our cultural moment. If there were ever a time our country needed “The Power of We,” it’s today. Our cultural propensity toward hyper-individualism, is matched by radical political disunity (as we’ve seen in the government shutdown), *and* rampant loneliness, which our former surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy, recently called an “epidemic. “The POWER OF WE” addresses all that and more.
3. The third reason I’m so excited is because we’ve never been stronger as a church. If we get this, God’s grace will take us into new territory individually and collectively that will be felt in here and out there. Our greatest days are ahead!

Jesus articulated this vision as his dying wish in a prayer captured for us in John 17.

Read John 17:20-23

In light of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, I want to share three commitments that will help us see how can we be at our best together living the Power of WE?

I. WE will pursue community with intentionality.

In verse 20, Jesus shifts from praying for his current disciples to praying for all of his future followers.

Stop. Consider. Jesus prayed for you! And the Bible says (in Hebrews 7:25) “He always lives to make intercession (always prays!) for [us]” WOW!

Here, with three requests in rapid succession, Jesus reveals his heart for our unity!

- Verse 21: *“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.”*
- And then verse 22: *“That they may be one even as we are one”*
- And then in verse 23: *“that they may become perfectly one.”*

Let’s break these down in their theological potency.

First, Jesus emphasizes unity as mutual sharing. Those two words in v. 21, “just as,” should amaze us!

- Just as Jesus enjoys oneness with the Father, we enjoy oneness with one another.
 - Jesus shared the same essence and purpose with the Father (John 10:30 - “I and the Father are one”).
 - Now, because he is in us (23), his divine life flows through our veins. His very life is beating in our chest, which means, if you have Jesus, and I have Jesus, we’re one!
 - He has shared his glory with us. Now as we live in community, our oneness reflects his oneness. He made us for relationship because he is a relational God!
- When we see one another, our first and most dominant should be: (don’t miss this): they belong to Christ. The most important reality about them is the most important reality about me!

T: We’re talking about essential unity and it IS a present reality. Look around... like it or not: you’re one! Now, it’s our privilege and responsibility to grow into that oneness.

That’s what Jesus prays for in Verse 23: *“That they may become perfectly one.”* (23)

- Jesus prays for a robust, mature, dynamic, unity that is ever developing into the fullness of God’s design.
- But “perfectly one” does not happen without a hard hat. We have to work at it!

How?

I know of no greater path than intentionally investing TIME by MOVING TOWARD ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.

The way we try to accelerate this in our church family is through our **GROUPS**.

- Groups provide a context for Jesus’ vision of mutual sharing to happen.
- Sure, Sundays serve as a starting point for connection, but Sundays should be the continuation of and the catalyst for the intense community happening throughout the week.

Consider two reasons why it’s so important to move toward one another in love throughout the week.

1) Intentional time enables us to fulfill Jesus’ “one another” vision.

- How will we love, serve, pray for, forgive, encourage, be kind, teach, and build up one another, if we don’t spend meaningful & extended time together?
- How will I hurt when you hurt, if I don’t know you’re hurting? How will I rejoice when you rejoice, if I don’t know you’re rejoicing?
- Jesus’ vision for unity says this: “What happens to you, happens to me.” That’s how deep we’re going here. That’s true unity, truer and deeper than following each other on social media (as great as that may be).
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2) Intentional time together accelerates everyone’s spiritual growth into the image of Jesus.

- What happens when you put two people together who are walking with God?
 - His love motivates his love.

- Her devotion encourages his devotion.
- Now multiply that by 100s of relationships!
 - How they serve others inspires others toward selflessness.
 - How they speak to people multiplies hundreds of kind words.
 - How they practice hospitality undercuts our cultural bent toward privacy and individualism.
- Here's the point: The Christ in you stirs up the Christ in me.

Are you with me? But we have to live in close enough proximity for it to take effect! We have to move toward one another consistently!

Groups are not the be all, end all, they provide a context for relationships to go from multiple days to every day.

T: But as we pursue community with intentionality, we will necessarily...

II. We will **display unity in diversity. (8-10)**

This idea is embedded in Jesus' prayer.

- In verse 20, he prays "*For those who will believe.*" Who will believe? Billions of people from all over the world!
- And here's some news for you: those people are very, very different!
- I know some of you are so beautiful and so amazing, that it's extremely difficult not to think the world would be if everyone was just like you :) , BUT Jesus lived and died for a global vision of people from every nation all *coming together* under the banner of HIS NAME!
- **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two" (Ephesians 2:13-15)**
- Don't you love the diversity God has built in the people known as Redemption Hill? Almost 40 nations represented, kids, college students, young professionals, families, those with more wisdom and life experience, rich & poor, blue & white collar, educated, Uber-educated, and over educated :),
- BUT what we are saying with "THE POWER OF WE" is we want our diverse church to become more diverse!
- If you don't see people that look like you, stick around and help us change that. I promise you this: I will go after them with you! No games!
- I believe the display of unity in diversity is one of the biggest reasons why people are going to want to be a part of this church and we'll soon outgrow this room and need to start another service. Why wouldn't we be anticipating that in 2019?

T: But let me be clear... The Power of We is about unity, not uniformity.

We are better together, precisely because we are different. We have different strengths, skills, experiences, and passions.

We see this on Sundays, at prayer nights, in our church membership and leadership . . . but perhaps the clearest picture of unity in diversity is in our **TEAMS**.

Teams provide a place for unique people to use their unique, God-given gifts for the good of others. RHC is a great church because everyone understands how they can make a unique contribution to the common good. THANK YOU (RK, Greet, sing, setup, serve our city...)! (APPLAUD THEM)

We all bring something different to the table. If you are not yet serving with a Team, please know: we are not as strong without you!

- Just last week, my lovely wife asked me to bring up the clothes in the dryer and move the ones in the washer to the dryer. That's called doing the laundry... Picture me rolling...
- What if I would have come upstairs *empty handed*?
- What if I would have come upstairs *empty handed* and said, "That's not my job."?
- What if I would have come upstairs *empty handed* and said, "That's not my job. That's a woman's job."

T: Now, before you throw stones at me, let me be clear I do not think that at all. I came up with the clothes and then did the dishes! Ha!

But here's the point: Christians make an equally egregious error in the church by sitting on the sidelines and saying: "That's not my job. They can do that." OR an equally egregious confusion of categories by sitting on the sidelines and say: "That's not my job. That's the pastor's job."

If you know Jesus, he gave you life so you can GET. IN. THE. GAME. and play your part in the beautiful symphony known as the church.

T: THE POWER OF WE is about working together to display great unity in the midst diversity.

III. We will build community through community. (8-10)

Notice two things in the text.

- The new community follows Jesus because the old community fulfills the mission of Jesus. Check verse 20: *"for those who will believe in me through their word"*
- But this new community live in such unity that other people want to join their community.
- It's building community through community!
- Listen to Jesus praying...
 - Verse 21: *"[that they may be one...] so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*
 - Verse 23: *"[that they may become perfectly one,] So that the world may know you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

Do you see that?

- When people see our unity and our love, many will say... "Something is up with them. I can't put my finger on it, but the way the sacrifice their own preferences, the way the give of their own resources to help one another, the way they serve our city together is soo compelling, I need in on that."
- Jesus says, "How you love one another reveals how much you've been loved by God!"

- This echoes John 13:35. **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for another.” (John 13:35)**

Jesus’ prayer for unity is not for us to form a holy huddle (Shoutout Patriots: 9th Super Bowl in 17 years with Brady as the starting quarterback).

- It’s unity for the sake of mission!
- We huddle to run plays!

We’re together but we’re going somewhere together and inviting others to go with us!

- What will striving side by side look like?
- Here’s a simple encouragement: Do what you do, and do it with others. Do what others do, and do it with them.
 - When you watch the Super Bowl, or the movies, or go to dinner, go with some RHC friends invite some non-RHC friends.
- Here’s another idea: During the next snow storm, go serve one of your RHC family members, and then the two of you go shovel someone else’s sidewalk!
- According to Jesus, life together is mission together.

Jesus is telling us many people need to see how we live before they believe what we believe. They will “belong” before they believe.

- Story: Just last week, I spent time with a friend who has been a part of our church for about two years. Quite frankly. They’ve been through a lot of suffering in their life, including being mistreated by a church.
- But do you know what they said to me?
- “I want what you guys have. Your church not only talks the talk, you walk the walk.”
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- That is “the Power of WE”!
- This may be your story... You’ve stepped around the edges of Christianity, never fully embraced Jesus, but through your experience with the people known as Redemption Hill Church, you see that his love his real, that if God can change a bunch of average people like us, he can change you!
- Wouldn’t it be amazing if Jesus’ prayer became a reality again by you saying YES to him today.

T: We will build community through community.

CONCLUSION: My invitation to you today is this...

The Point: Live the vision of Jesus through the POWER OF WE.

Can you imagine how our lives will be enriched? How we will reflect the heart of God as we move toward one another with his love, displaying unity in diversity, building community through community? So as...

VERBAL CUE: the Music Team comes up to lead us in a time of reflection and response, I want to ask you...

To pull out the Vision Card you received when you walked in... grab a pen... and begin to record how God is leading you to live the Power of We.

What steps is God leading you to take?

IS IT renewing your commitment to being here consistently on Sundays?

IS IT Connecting with a Group?

IS IT Serving with a Team?

IS IT committing to be a part of RHC through church membership?

Perhaps you just need to jot a few words down...

- Pray more with others.
- Call don't text.
- Be more vulnerable.
- Seek reconciliation with _____.
- Do mission together!

Perhaps the greatest step you can take is to say: I'm done with my half-hearted commitment to you God. I accept the gift of salvation Jesus lived, died and rose to bring me. I will follow him with everything I've got! His arms are wide open to you!

Here's my second question: **Who will you invite to encourage you?**

You can try to do this on your own, but the whole point of the Power of WE is that we will be at our best when we do this together. Who can you go to this week and say: "Help me. Encourage me. Pray for me. Check in with me, and I will do the same for you."

Prayer...