

I think by now you all know that Jennifer, Kristin, and I are a pretty stalwart unit. We are not the siblings with years of jealousy and nit-picking behind us that now as we're older we have to get over. We don't have that one big thing sitting in our past that has never been dealt with. We're just we three. Generally, we like the same movies, we listen to the same music, we're different for sure, but on the whole it is not hard to tell that the three of us belong to each other and are a pretty united front on most things. The only place that comes into question though...is book club.

Jenn started a book club with her congregation several years ago and somewhere along the way suckered Kristin and I into joining along, despite the fact that I was already in multiple and Kristin was fairly book club averse. We all rotate taking turns on who gets to pick each month and we all approach our choice differently. Jenn goes with a fairly even keel pick, something that should be pretty innocuous. I go with something I haven't read yet because then that way I have no expectations of how anyone is going to react. Kristin tends to pick tried and true choices from her catalog, books she has loved that she can talk about readily. This year was no exception. Jenn chose a nice kind of magical, family story with a hint of romance. I am choosing a cozy mystery I have only heard good things about, and Kristin, well Kristin chose one of her absolute favorite books she

has ever read. She had been wanting me to read this book for eons and once I did, well we spent a good portion of a three hour drive dissecting it and raving about all the intricacies and interesting moments. We both *loved* this book, and then...we signed on to our actual meeting only to fully find out that Jennifer absolutely *hated* this book. All of the things that we loved, she found vexing. Her favorite character was my least favorite character. The character Kristin found most interesting, Jennifer despised. There was nothing, literally nothing that we could agree on on this book and just like that it was like well...united front on everything but the topic of *The Essex Serpent*, that is where we apparently draw the line.

It is sometimes a deep comfort to imagine that even as he is living out his fully, deeply human life, that Jesus had some idea about how the world was going to continue turning, that he had a good pulse on humanity and where the world was going to go in the post-resurrection years. And yet, while I want to hold onto that hope, when I read gospels like today, it just kind of makes me want to laugh, because if Jesus knew how we all were going to operate with each other, I'm not sure he would have quite gone so hard on *this theme* for the last few words he says to the disciples before his arrest. I want to say, really Jesus? Unity? That's what you want to go out on? Have you met humans? Eek...

And yet, that's what we have. Jesus has been praying extensively for the disciples over the last several weeks, making sure that in these last few hours of their time together, he gets everything off of his heart that he wants and needs them to hear. He has prayed about them remaining in and dwelling deeply in his love, the love that binds Jesus to God. He has prayed that they will not be troubled or afraid, but will be at peace. He has prayed that they will recognize the Holy Spirit when the Advocate arrives to remind them of everything he has taught, and now as he comes to the end of his prayer, he honest in on the one thing he most ardently wants for them: unity. And this isn't just like link arms and sing "Kumbaya" type of unity, but unity at the level of how Jesus and God are united. It is deep, abiding connection that will allow them to be one as God and Jesus are one, and this is the point where I'm like...Jesus...you remember you are praying for *human beings* right? Because if there is one thing that we don't do well as a species is this...unity.

But no, this is what Jesus drills down on. He wants the last thing the disciples to hear from him to be this message of interconnectedness. He knows what's coming, and that his arrest, death, and resurrection are going to be jarring enough, traumatic enough to cause cracks in the foundation. These are the type of things that pull people apart and keep them separated,

because there will be so many emotions circulating amongst them at super high levels. Fear, joy, anxiety, grief. All of those things are going to be cranked to 11 and he knows they need to hear this prayer he has for them, that through it all they will remember who they are, together. They are one. They always have been and they always will be. United together.

And I mean...from what we know through history...this kind of comes to fruition. There is no doubt that the disciples *went through it*, but they stayed together. Peter didn't get kicked out of the group for his moments of denial. Thomas didn't get bullied and heckled because he wanted proof of the resurrection. John wasn't shunted to the side because he kept referring to himself as the disciple Jesus loved. Even through having to replace Judas amongst their number, they held it together, and I have to believe that they held together because of the three years of groundwork they had laid which built a foundation of connection and relationship. They had seen each other through the best and worst of times, stormy seas and moments of uncertainty. Even when things got hard, they *knew* each other and that had to have made a difference, that had to have been a huge reason why Jesus' prayer came to fruition, at least amongst the 11 of them.

But then...I think of the world now and I don't know about you, but I just want to laugh at poor Jesus here, like my dude, we can do a lot of things,

but calling us to unity feels like the most impossible task you could give to humanity. Have you met us? We actively *try* to find things to disagree about! Even when it comes to faith we aren't interested in unity all the time. Everyone has a different opinion about something and so it's like you want us to be as connected as you are to God? Keep on praying! Good luck. And yet...this is Jesus...and yes he does know us, and he knows what it is to be human so, what are we getting wrong?

I think it goes back to the disciples, the foundation of friendship and community that allowed them to get through the hard, to stay bound together even when things were rocky. More and more we are living in a world that has all the capabilities of interconnectedness and yet, we are probably as disconnected as we can get. It's superficial connection. Oh yeah, I'm friends with this person, but mostly because I like their stuff on Facebook, but I haven't talked to them in eons. Oh yeah, I know that person, but no clue anything about their life. Even here amongst ourselves, we see each other on Sunday, we pass the peace, we maybe say hello, but we don't *know* each other deeply necessarily and so when the tough gets tough, we don't always know how to stay together, to tap into this unity Jesus has prayed for.

So...we're going to do something a little different this morning...we're going to spend the next couple of minutes *talking* to each

other, and I know, the introverts in the room are probably screaming, but remember, we're family, we're community, you are safe here. So, here is the task. Find someone you haven't spent a lot of time chatting with. Not the person you come to church with every week, not a family member, find someone that stretches you a smidge outside of your normal circle, and talk. Introduce yourself and then dare to ask each other this question, what is on your heart right now and how can I pray for you? If you feel so inclined, pray together or take notes a commit to praying for one another this week. We're gonna take five minutes, be amongst each other, unite, answer Jesus' prayer and remember this was what we were made for, made for one another, made for community, made for a unity that can love us through the difficult and that can carry us through the hard.