

Get to the Point
[Text - John 17:6-11]

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Toward the end of the Gospel attributed to John, there are five entire chapters that contain flowery, lengthy, and [dare I say] somewhat convoluted speeches attributed to Jesus. This morning's New Testament Reading contains a small, yet vital portion of one of them: "Holy One, I have made your name known to those whom you gave me....The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them....All mine are yours, and yours are mine....Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be One, as we are One."

The Gospel writer takes his time, but eventually he gets to the point: that Jesus has an authentic, integrated and ongoing relationship with the Divine Source of Life; and the Oneness which Jesus experiences with his Divine Source, is conveyed and carried forward by the Oneness of those who follow Jesus' path. Jesus' prayer, "that they may be One, as we are One" expresses a fundamental insight: that the key to humankind surviving and thriving, lies in our willingness to recognize that we are all in this together! For Jesus, the pathway to genuine and lasting Life, is found in our unity with the Holy One and with one another; and it is expressed by the way in which we *treat* one another: with respect and fairness, kindness and love. Love that bridges our differences and divisions. Love that unites us and assures us that we all are welcome and included - especially the most vulnerable among us.

For Christians, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism serves as a tangible sign of our inseparable relationship with the Holy One, *and* with one another! For when we are immersed [as it were] into the overflowing love and grace of our Divine Source, we begin to let go of the fears and doubts that keep us from seeing ourselves and others as we truly are - cherished children of the Holy One. And as you and I learn to trust in that Divine Love which welcomes us *as we are* - we are set free to be true to ourselves, to others, and to God. And by the Grace of God, we grow and develop into the kind of compassionate individuals - and community - that welcome and embrace all people with the life-changing power of Divine Love.

An important theological understanding that is demonstrated and emphasized with the baptism of an infant, is that the smallest and most vulnerable among us really are welcomed and included. What's also revealed, is that Baptism is a *community* event. In addition to the child's natural family, each child baptized here connects to a much larger family - the Brecksville United Church of Christ, and the all-inclusive Body of Christ throughout the world. Within this extended family, every child can receive nurture and care, support and encouragement as she or he develops and grows. Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Divine Realm belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Divine Realm like a little child will never enter it!"

To enter and fully participate in the Divine Realm, requires a child-like spirit of openness and acceptance, welcome and wonder. That's because the radically *inclusive* nature of the Divine Realm simply cannot include our adult-acquired tastes for prejudicial judgements and exclusion, negativity and cynicism. Fortunately, a Church community can be an excellent venue for un-learning those negative characteristics, and for practicing those Christ-like qualities of compassion and inclusion, forgiveness and grace.

Here at Brecksville United Church of Christ, we understand that the invitation to come to the Waters of Baptism [and to partake of the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion] is an invitation extended to *all*. Jesus Christ is our gracious Host, who never turns-away anyone because they aren't pious or pure enough. In fact, the only people to whom Jesus expresses emphatic disapproval, are those who feel that their own piety and purity puts them above others.

The Good News that Jesus proclaims, is that the Divine Source from whom we all derive deeply desires to touch and transform our entire world - bringing Light out of darkness, Hope out of despair, Life out of death, unity and wholeness out of divisiveness and brokenness. And no matter how young or old, every person around us needs to hear - and experience - that *Good News*: that they are a loved and treasured child of the Holy One! And that they are truly welcome within this wonderful Family of Faith.