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Scripture: John 17

Title: Peace, Unity, and Love

John 17

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

17 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, 2 since you have given him authority over all people,[a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 “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. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, 8 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. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. 11 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. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that [b] you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, [c] so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 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. [d] 14 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.

15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.[e] 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,[f] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 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 have

loved them even as you have loved me. 24 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.

25 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 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.”

This is the Word of the Lord

Please pray with me...

Introduction:

Like some of you, I take a few minutes every couple days to skim social media to see what is happening in the lives of those I love on Facebook and Instagram and I also check out what is happening in the world. We all know social media can be used for good or bad. I tend to watch a lot of sports replays and since I am a Seahawks fan, I am enjoying replays of great plays from their recent win and I am getting ready to cheer them on in the Super Bowl.

I also am interested in articles and interviews related to national and global concerns. I follow various news sources. I try to understand what people are saying from the left, right, and middle, just so I can have an informed perspective. Sometimes what I see makes me sad or angry. I try to stay in a place of grace, hope, peace, and love, but I am human and like you I can get discouraged at times with the state of the world.

This last week, I was inspired by a group of Buddhist monks who are walking from Texas to Washington DC with a focus on spreading the value of peace. These monks have a large social media presence on Instagram. People of all ages are tuning in to learn about their pilgrimage and folks in various cities are meeting them along the road and listening to them share wisdom at various gatherings. Here are some other specific detail about the walk that I found online.

“The Walk for Peace is a long-distance pilgrimage in the United States initiated by Buddhist monks from the Huong Dao Vipassana Bhavana Center in Fort Worth, Texas, to Washington, D.C., promoting peace, compassion, and nonviolence. The walk began on October 26, 2025, and is planned to span approximately 2,300 miles (3,700 km) in 110 days, concluding in February 2026. The monks have been documenting their travels on social media and are accompanied by a rescue dog named Aloka, who has become a symbolic figure in the journey.[1]

Background

The pilgrimage was organized by a group of 24 monks from the Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist tradition, affiliated with the Huong Dao Temple[2] in Fort Worth.[3] Inspired by the teachings of Gautama Buddha, the Walk for Peace aims to raise "awareness of peace, loving kindness, and compassion across America and the world."[4]

In a written statement, Bhikkhu Pannakara, spiritual leader of the Walk for Peace, said, "We walk to awaken the peace that already lives within each of us."

"The Walk for Peace is a simple yet meaningful reminder that unity and kindness begin within each of us and can radiate outward to families, communities, and society as a whole,"

If you have ever met a Buddhist monk, you will notice that they are generally very peaceful people. They seek to be present or mindful at every moment and that includes when they have a conversation with

you. Buddhist monks are uniquely also committed to non-violence. In Christianity, we have elements of nonviolent teaching, but most Christians I know frankly struggle to believe nonviolence is realistic. Despite the model of Jesus, we Christians are pretty comfortable at times with the necessity of violence to get things done in this world. Although, many people value peaceful protest for causes they care about, it is interesting that protests don't always seem peaceful, even when good causes are championed in different ways. Too often I hear rhetoric from both the left and right that seems angry and hurtful. Now I support caring for immigrants, including asylum seekers and refugees. I support racial justice and care of creation with a focus on environment justice concerns like the reduction of pollution. I believe we need to love all people and welcome everyone into our places of faith, businesses, and schools. The Presbyterian Church USA is a welcoming denomination. But as we engage in any form of activism, as Christian or as spiritual people

like our Buddhist brothers and sisters, we are encouraged to always engage the world with a deep spirit of love and compassion.

Some will say, but didn't Jesus turn over the money changers table in the temple. Jesus did get mad sometimes. The answer is yes, Jesus got upset sometimes, but his general presence in most environments even among his opposition was kind, strong, and compassionate.

So when I saw these Buddhist monks walking many miles in pursuit of peace and when I heard some of them teach with such love, peace, and wisdom I took notice.

I wonder if God is calling the Christian Church and people of other faiths who wish to be active peacemakers in the world, to serve the world from a place of spiritual depth.

In our Scripture this morning, Jesus is praying for his disciples and he prays for the future Church. I am curious about verse 4 and 5 where Jesus says, 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that

you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

Jesus makes reference to experiencing God's presence prior to coming to earth. Jesus existed in some form before the incarnation and now he wishes to experience God's glory and presence again as he prepares to finish his life on earth.

Jesus is desiring of the presence of God. I am interested in that word presence. When you meet someone who is spiritual, do you notice how they seem to be more present for you. I understand we are all human and therefor not always very present, but I do notice that on our prayer retreats at this church, we all become a little more present to God and each other. Something about slowing down enough to enjoy nature, spiritual reflection on Scripture, and prayer, calms our senses and makes us more present to God, ourselves, and each other.

Tich Nat Hanh, a Buddhist monk who also had roots of faith that connected to Christianity, was fond of saying one of the great things we can do in our relationships with those we love is to give them the gift of presence. He encouraged his followers to look at their loved ones and say, darling I see you. Then Tich Nat Hanh would teach that one must truly listen to one's love without feeling the need to interrupt or interject one's opinion.

If you're like me and you hear this teaching, you might be like, that sounds hard. And I think it is hard, but Buddhist Monks and contemplative Christians and others learn to cultivate a deep spirituality that helps them truly be present with God, with self, and with others.

I think the Buddhist monks who are walking towards Washington DC for the purpose of peace are capturing our nations attention because they offer something deeply spiritual in a time where some much of even the best activism is easily thrust into so much pain

and anger that we are struggling to know how to engage the world.

These monks are taking pictures with people of all ages, law enforcement, individuals with disabilities, people of many ethnic heritages. The monks themselves are Vietnamese.

Jesus was deeply spiritual on earth and he remains deeply spiritual in heaven. He defended the vulnerable and oppressed. Jesus himself was a brown skinned child refugee in Egypt. But what made Jesus so special was his ability to express the presence of God wherever he went. We as followers of Jesus, as human beings created in the image of Jesus are invited to share his presence wherever we go. As we care for the vulnerable, we can be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Maybe this sounds spiritually broad, but I think those monks are spreading the presence of Christ wherever they go as they share the presence of peace.

They are also embodying the values of unity and love.

Jesus prays for unity and love for his disciples and for those who will hear their message. Similar to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus also prays that God will protect his followers from the evil one. If you are like me, I know I am getting off track or lost when I feel like evil is weakening my faith in God or my faith in humanity. There are times when we can get discouraged and evil begins to tear us down internally and we start to function with less kindness towards others and outright enmity towards people who have different opinions than are one. We are quick to justify our values and anger. If Jesus or one of the Buddhist monks would meet us on the road, they would compassionately invite us to breathe and return to our senses. They would invite us to pray and seek the love of God within us and around us. They would seek to help us find peace in our souls. In that place of peace, evil cannot reign and love ultimately wins.

Friends, for those of you who are engaged in social justice work for the vulnerable, please keep doing it. We need good activists. The

Presbyterian Church USA and many other Christian denominations understand that the gospel requires us to engaged in social justice activism. My prayer is that as we engage in social justice or as we engage in any form of service and ministry in our lives, that we will do it with a spirit of love and compassion for all. We are to engage the world with peace, unity, and love from a spiritual center. As Christians, we walk with Jesus who is our brother, friend, and Savior. We walk in peace because Jesus Christ is the prince of peace. And remember as we walk in peace, there is a joy that can fill up our souls. Love has a way of bringing joy to the world around us even in the face of real pain and sorrow that exists in our world.

Please pray with me...