### “I in Them” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 1, 2025

**Revelation 22:12-13, 16-17, 20-21**

12 “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. . . It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears say, “Come.” And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. . . 20 The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

**John 17:20–26**

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, 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 whom you’ve 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.”

Again we see Jesus calling himself “the Alpha and the Omega” (22:13), as we heard two weeks ago, from Rev 21:6. Most importantly, this passage speaks of “Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift” (22:17). The spiritual gifts are free, if you are willing to be changed by them. But the generosity is always there.

This graciousness is also present in Jesus’ prayer in John 17, where he asks that his followers may be unified, “so that the world may know that you have sent me” (17:23), so that his followers “may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me” (17:24), and “so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them” (17:26). Let’s look at those three points. He wants the world to know that the Father sent the Son, he wants his followers to see the divine glory, and he wants the Father’s love to be in them. Unity among the believers will help to solidify recognition of God’s connection to the Son. If the believers are unified with the Son, they will be able to see the divine glory. And their unity will allow love to penetrate their lives fully. Spiritual unity, not just political or ecclesiastical unity, is what he is seeking. It is important that his followers may see the divine glory, and spiritual unity is essential to this spiritual insight.

What is the secret of spiritual unity? I don’t think it is doctrinal belief, church affiliation, or mental conformity. It is shared motivation, common spiritual goals, and shared values. It is what drives us, more than where we are. After all, it is where we are headed that matters more than where we are. We can come from different places and yet be unified in our goals.

It seems that an ethical respect for others is an essential ingredient in spiritual unity. It allows for free persons to come together not in an ironclad, authoritarian structure with a rigid list of rules, but in a familial atmosphere characterized by mutual respect and sincerity.

Jesus made membership in God’s family dependent not upon culture or race, but only on “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). Admission to Jesus’ family had one requirement: honest willingness to do the will of God (Mark 3:35; John 7:17). Religion must be social because humanity is social, but Jesus’ religion points out the *inwardness* of Personality, changing the world by changing the individual. Each of us is a unique and important member of God’s family. Jesus’ teaching is personalist, in that it recognizes the significance and freedom of each child of God. His message would transform *persons*, and persons would then have an effect in the world.

People who have become willing partners with God are changed inwardly, and they bring about change outwardly. It’s a kind of synchronicity. Religious unity must be founded upon an enlightened personalism complemented with recognition of the all-encompassing unity of Deity. Spiritual unity does not mean conformity. It means a balancing of freedom, respect, and responsibility. One has creative freedom in one’s own life, but one has respect toward the creative freedom of one’s fellows. And finally, one retains a strong sense of responsibility toward God. Today we can begin to grow our relationship with God, to have active conversations.

As always, balancing is important. We have our own personal commitment, which may be very intense. We balance that out with loving and respecting our fellows. And our motivation to do God’s will can be synchronized with others’ similar motivation.

The Parliament of World Religions met in Chicago in 1893 with representatives of dozens of religions and religious groups meeting together in harmony and respect, eager to learn about each other’s values. A hundred years later, a number of religionists held another Parliament, again in Chicago, and formulated a Global Ethic about respect and understanding, and condemning all hatred in the name of religion. The Parliament continues to happen about every three to five years in different locations now.

In summary, if people share the same goals, are motivated alike to do the will of God, it doesn’t matter what different concepts and theologies they might have. They can respect the uniqueness of personality, honoring the God within each person, and working toward broader understanding. For Christians, we will strive to embody God’s love in our lives. Jesus said that the love of the Father that is in the Son can be in us, as well. And anyone who wishes can partake of this water of life. People will come to recognize that God is with those people who show forth that love.

Let us talk about it, read about it, and seek to embody it. We will not imprison anyone under religious control, but liberate ourselves and each other to seek God’s will in creative freedom. If we gather together in freedom and love we can contribute to an atmosphere where free and creative personality is expressed.

My hope is that we, as a church community, will remain engaged and continue to grow. May you encounter God’s love here and be empowered to share that love with others.