

“Jesus' Prayer for Us”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, May 28, 2017
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Readings from Scripture: Acts 1:6-14 and John 17:1-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1:6-14

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

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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 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. 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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.

John 17:1-11

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words and images, the joys and worries that each of us carry within, the words that we've offered in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from sacred scripture and the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all of these into the living word of Jesus Christ. And let that word do its work within our hearts, our minds, our souls. Let it be a word of comfort where there is hurt, a word of hope where there is discouragement, a word of peace where there is strife and a word of challenge and invitation where there is work to do before us. In all things let it good news. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

At the 9:05 service we have lay readers that read the gospel and then Karen or I stand up and offer the sermon immediately afterwards. This morning as I was coming around the bend by the kitchen in order to take my robe off and to get back to Fellowship Hall in time, I heard Grettie Muckler call my name and ask, "How do you want me to read that scripture? What kind of voice do you want? Do you want an angry voice or a happy voice, a sad voice? What do you want me to do with that tongue twister?" is what she said. And I couldn't agree with her more—a tongue twister at the beginning of this passage about glorify your son so that the son may glorify you and glorify on earth and glorify—glorify, glorify, glorify. What is Jesus doing in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John? We need to go back all the way to the beginning of the 13th chapter of the Gospel of John which says, *Now before the festival of the passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And so during supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, tied a towel around himself, poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

Four chapters later Jesus is still at that meal. At the beginning of it, they set it up that he knows he's about to be put to death and to rise again and go to the Father. His first act is not to teach by speaking but instead to teach by doing. He takes off his robe. He gets on his hands and knees and he washes the disciples' feet. And then he spends four chapters teaching them all kinds of things, and talking about all kinds of ways to be a good Christian in today's world. I will not preach on the entire four chapters. Can I get an "Amen"?

You need to set the image in your mind, okay, of a loving teacher, a rabbi, sitting at a big table with maybe 20 or 30 people who have committed their lives for the last three years to be with him. He is sitting at the head of the table. He knows what's coming and this is what Jesus is saying to them at the very end of their time together. I liken it to the opportunity that any of us would have if we knew that this was going to be our last week on earth and that we have called our family together for one last meal. This is what we would say in that moment. Jesus, unfortunately, in the Gospel of John through the translations and the language sounds so "churchy" in what he is saying. I am going to try to translate it for us into language that maybe sounds a little more real to each of us.

I've been thinking about this word "glory" that at the beginning of the passage goes back and forth and back and forth, and I've wondered what does it look like? What does it mean,—this word glory? Does it look like the halo that surrounds Jesus' head, or the lighted circle around his heart where the dove is (in the stained glass window)? Is that what glory looks like? Is it something that's radiating out of our heads? Or does glory look more like a heart that has been pierced, filling the cup that is overflowing out into the world?

I think we often think of glory in these very religious terms, the power of God shining down upon us, like a hand or a flame, and we end up with a halo around our heads because we are special. This is God's glory. We sing to God's praise and that's what God and Jesus are talking about. And in some sense, that's true. But as I thought about it more and more, I think that what Jesus is talking about is the pierced heart that fills the cup that we are about to share together. The cup that says you are welcomed always in my family, you belong, there's a place for you. All of your past mistakes are forgiven. You need not stay away because of anything you've ever done in your entire life, or who you are or what you believe, you belong here with me now. Glory looks like that cup, that heart, pouring forward into the lives of others so that they know that they are loved and cared about. Again, think about what you might say, knowing it was your last chance to address your loved ones.

Jesus then goes on to say again in strange language, gospel language, that he has taught the disciples everything that he has been given to teach them. He doesn't say it in the way I would want him to say it, but he says it in this way: That he has kept the word and the word is within him and now the word that God gave him he has given to them and they have received the word and they know the truth and they believe it. Oh, Lord! What he could have said is, Father, they were with me when I had the two fish, the five loaves. They were with me when she said, 'but even the dogs get the crumbs from the table.' They heard about the woman at the well who said, 'give me the living water', they were with me when I spat in the mud and the blind person could see, they were with me when the hungry got fed and the prisoners got set free. Here at the end of this long discourse in John's labored language, this is what Jesus is saying. Everything he has been taught he has handed on to his disciples.

So in a sense, this is a prayer of commissioning for us as Christians, those who are called out and set apart and invited to go forth and to continue to be Christ's presence in the world. All of mine are yours, yours are mine and I have been poured out into them. In other words, you and I have been filled by the presence of Christ and it's our job, now, to go forth and to share. It is not easy to be filled with the presence of Christ and to go forth and to share.

This past weekend I had the opportunity to go to church on the beach in Sarasota—I know, oh poor you! I did have to hammer a hole in the sand to get the umbrella to stand upright, okay, so it wasn't all roses and sun screen but it was pretty close. I was with my friend, Bruce, who according to his wife hadn't taken a vacation in about a year. He was kinda tired. We were talking about ministering. He and his wife are co-pastors of a church. One of the things that we were wondering about one evening is how much time does it take for God to recharge our batteries when we do ministry? I don't know about you, but I have a phone that when it's time to plug it in to recharge it, there is a big picture of a battery and there is a red line and then it's like 20, and then 15, and then it says should I shut down or stay on. You say, "No, stay on." And then it just dies. Life is like that, too. Serving others is like that. It takes energy when you pour forth, when you glorify, when your heart is pierced and it fills the cup and the cup goes forth and serves others—it takes energy out of you.

So we were wondering, how long does it take? Does it take God a couple hours for each hour? Does it take 8 hours? On some sorts of things it might take 12 or 20 hours, depending upon what it is. He does trauma ministry on behalf of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and we figure that if he went out on a very intense deployment for five days, working for 12 hours a day, that would be 600 hours. And if he came back and only could spend two hours a day in a five day work week recharging himself, it would take him 60 weeks to be restored—over a year—for five days

worth of work. I wonder if this is why Jesus' ministry on earth was only three years long, because it took everything out of him and he had nothing left to give.

If it were your last meal with your loved ones, would you hold anything back? Or would you pour out everything that's in your heart? Would you tell them that you love them? That you want the best for them, that your hopes and dreams and wishes are that they become all that God has ever wanted them to be? That they feel happy and secure and safe and that somehow by the power of the Spirit you'll be with them forever? This is the message that Jesus gives to his disciples. And the invitation that I've taken away from it, is an invitation that I believe all of us can grab onto. Let's not wait until it actually is our final moment to say what we need to say. Amen.