

“The Prayer”
 May 28, 2017
 Text: John 17:1-11

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ
 Seventh Sunday of Easter

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."

The High Priestly Prayer

There are key moments in life. Inescapable moments. Life and death moments. Times when you are tested and your true heart is revealed. In today's Gospel passage Jesus is at one of the these moments.

“Father,” Jesus says, “*the hour has come.*” Jesus knows it’s a pivotal moment; a *kairos* moment. It’s his time to turn to God in prayer and fully show what’s in his heart. This is no ordinary prayer. It comes from his deepest self and has, over time, become known as his high priestly prayer.

Glory Summoned

And Jesus needs something. He asks God for glory. Glory. What does he mean by that? Some sort of exaltation, some lifting up? Does he need more recognition? It is something Jesus is asking for in this prayer.

“*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.

He wants glory, but not for his own sake, but for the sake of of all those he wants to have eternal life. If they can know God, they can have eternal life, and if they can know Jesus, they can know God. Jesus needs that glory.

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. Hear that reminder of the eternity of Jesus; that he is the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus is there at the beginning and will be there at the end. The opening chapter of John's Gospel lays it out:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

Jesus is an eternal person of the the Triune God and the glory of God is not unfamiliar to him. But Jesus of Nazareth needs the glory of God to shine through him now, because this is the crucial moment, his hour has come and he will soon be put to death. He continues to pray to God:

Keeping God's Word

"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.

Jesus knows that some already have the Word of God in them and have hearts that know him and want to follow the Way of life. Salvations have begun! Perhaps we can have that heart.

Last summer I presided over the funeral of old Jeremiah Bowen. He was 94 and was a veteran of the US Coast Guard. In World War II his ship, the USS Leopold, was sunk by a U-Boat in the cold Northern Atlantic on March 1, 1944, and of the 199 on board, only 28 survived. Jerry Bowen was rescued out of the water, and this would be the pivotal moment of his life. His course was set as he returned home and worked in ambulance squads in North Jersey and then eventually joined the Fire Company in Norwood and became its Chief. Rescuing people was now in his blood. When he retired, he and his wife moved to the Jersey Shore, and in the last years of life he helped and encouraged people to rebuild after Sandy. Serving, loving, and rescuing to the end.

What does it mean to keep God's Word, but to have this kind of heart?

The Subject of the Prayer

This is how the heart of Jesus is revealed. The heart of Jesus is always being revealed in Scripture. And his heart is constantly being uncovered in life all around us—in others and in the natural world. What has come into being that has not come through Jesus? Nothing. All things came into being through him. Carefully look around and you will see him everywhere and in everything. But it's human beings Jesus particularly cares about. It is us who especially matter to his heart. Again, you can hear the beating heart of Jesus when he prays to God:

“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.”

We are all connected, and we are the subject of Jesus’s prayer. It’s for our liberation he prays. And it is for all humanity that Jesus will pay the ultimate sacrifice. It’s for our rescue, our healing, and our restoration that he will face death. When God steps into humanity as embodied in Jesus, his heart is expanded to an all-encompassing shape in which love cannot and will not be deterred. This kind of love reaches all, regardless of circumstance.

Do you remember Father Mychal Judge? Fr. Mychal Judge was a Franciscan priest in New York City who compassionately and lovingly cared for people in the city on the edges—the homeless people and people dying from AIDS. But he was also a chaplain to the New York Fire Department, and when the twin towers were struck on September 11, he quickly went to the site with all the first responders. When he arrived he immediately prayed over several bodies in the street. Then shortly after he administered last rights to a firefighter, he entered the North Tower and was struck by debris and died instantly. Serving, loving, rescuing to the end. We can see the heart of Jesus in people like Father Mychal Judge and Jeremiah Bowen.

All is One

And now Jesus’s time has come. *“I am no longer in the world,”* Jesus prays to God, *“but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.”* Then Jesus adds one more thing to his prayer:

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

And here the secret of the universe is revealed. *All is one. Protect them so that they may be one, as we are one.*

All is connected, all is one. What makes us one? What bond will hold us together in community so that we are modeled after the community of the Trinity which is One God, in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; three, but One nonetheless. Can we see Jesus Christ in another? In all? Will we believe that every person we encounter is made in the image of God. Fr. Richard Rohr, a contemporary Christian mystic puts it like this: *“You will know you are a Christian when you can look at everyone and say, ‘Image of God, image of God, image of God, Image of God...’ ”*

This is how we are able to love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable, and eventually sit down and share a meal with our enemies. On our own, we are sunk, we will fail, and no progress will be made. But

The good news is there is One who continues to pray for us, even now, saying *“Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”*

When we find our oneness, and the beauty of the circle of community takes shape, and an understanding of our interconnectedness takes root, we begin to see lives transformed and communities healed. When communities reflect the love and

connection that is found in the Triune God between the Father and the Son, and magnified in the Holy Spirit, even an entire nation can be healed.

Then we will have something to worship about. Then we will know where glory is properly placed. It's then we will recognize, embody, and reflect the heart of the One who puts it all on the line and lays down life for the sake of others—the one who is serving, loving, and rescuing all the way to the end. Amen.