

May 24, 2020
Rev. Kerry Smith

John 17:1-11 A Prayer
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 17:1-11 Common English Bible

When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.

"I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this 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 comes from you. This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

"I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. I'm no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I'm coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.

Jesus isn't speaking to us, Jesus is speaking to God. We are bystanders, listening in as Jesus prays for us and for the world. Right before he prays, Jesus watches Judas leave the Upper room, knowing that Judas is about to betray him to the authorities. After Jesus prays, he and the disciples go to the Garden where he is arrested and sentenced to death. Jesus' prayer is spoken between the events of betrayal and death.

It is a prayer of despair, but with words of love. "They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word... watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me." Jesus entrusts our future not to us, not to the church, not to the world, not to our government, but to God. Jesus gives us back to the one from whom we came.

Jesus wants us to know how deeply we are loved. We are deeply loved. Jesus wants us to know that we are as deeply loved by God as Jesus is loved by the one he calls Father. In his prayer Jesus reminds us that our future, the church's future, the world's future, our children's future, rests in God's hands, not our own. Jesus entrusts us in his prayer to God's care.

Charles Wood sent me an email this week and I loved one of the things that he said, "Our faith is ultimately not in ourselves, or simply in each other, but in the God who is "above," "beside," and "within." Those words at the end come from a litany from the Iona Community in Scotland. That litany lifts up, "the Maker who lit the world and breathed the breath of life for us... the Son who saved the world and stretched out his hands to us... the Spirit who encompasses the world and blesses our souls with yearning... the Trinity of Love, God above us, God beside us, God within us, the beginning, the end, the everlasting one."

Jesus tells us in his prayer that eternal life is knowing God and Jesus, but he does not mean knowing in a head way, but rather knowing in a relationship kind of way. Knowing in John's Gospel is to be in relationship and to be in relationship with Jesus is to be in relationship with God.

Preacher Nadia Bolz-Weber shared her prayers this past Sunday. She prayed, "I do not know when we can gather together again in worship, Lord. So, for now I just ask that: When I sing along in my kitchen to each song on Stevie Wonder's Songs in The Key of Life Album, that it be counted as praise. And that when I read the news and my heart tightens in my chest, may it be counted as a Kyrie. And that when my eyes brighten in a smile behind my mask as I thank the

cashier may it be counted as passing the peace. And that when I water my plants and wash my dishes and take a shower may it be counted as remembering my baptism. And that when the tears come and my shoulders shake and my breathing falters, may it be counted as prayer. And that when I stumble upon a Tabitha Brown video and hear her grace and love of you may it be counted as hearing a homily. And that as I sit at that table in my apartment, and eat one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding my time or attention, may it be counted as communion. Amen.”

My prayers for you have been that you would feel community. I spoke to someone yesterday whose voice broke as they told me that they had not been touched by another human being in two months. My prayer for you is that you would feel the Holy Spirit’s touch. My prayer is that you would feel cared for and loved. That you would know how loved you are. We are having to be creative with how we show love for one another. One of my friends said that so many parents were lamenting the loss of cancellation of planned trips and activities, but her 9 year old created a calendar for June and every day said summer with an explanation point. We may be grieving, but others are excited about summer explanation point!

Sherry Koeninger brought some donations for Emanuel Community Center by this week and she shared a story with me. She was in her house and she heard a shriek outside. She thought that someone had fallen so she looked outside and saw a dad running alongside his daughter as she rode her bicycle for the first time. Mom was not far behind with baby sister. The daughter on the bike had shrieked out of joy. Sherry said that normally the dad was at work, as was the mom, and the daughter was at preschool. It is only because we have had this set apart time that they were able to experience this milestone moment together.

Jesus is praying for us in this scripture to be sure of God’s love for us and for this world. Jesus is praying for us to remember that love wins in the end. Jesus prays for us that every single one of us will feel as deeply loved by God the Creator as Jesus feels. Jesus prays that we might know that we are as much a part of each other, as much a part of us, as much a part of God’s larger story as Jesus is a part of God’s own heart. Jesus prays that we may know that we have a home in the palm of God’s hand.

I want to become a living, breathing embodiment of Jesus’ prayer. God is God and it is not all up to us, but we are called to be part of what God is doing for good in the world. We have a responsibility to be a part of God’s work in building the beloved community. Preacher William Sloane Coffin once said the preacher’s job is to proclaim God’s promise that justice will roll down like the mighty waters, but it is up to the people in the congregation to figure out the irrigation system. How can we embody Jesus’ prayer for ourselves, for others, for our world? Jesus prays for us, and that means when the world says fear, we say go into this world in peace and have courage. When our world says all is lost, we say hold on to what is good. We help those who are suffering, we strengthen the fainthearted and support the weak.

We had our Administrative Board meeting last Sunday on Zoom and we talking about what will happen when our church building will be open again. There are groups that call this church home like Narcotics Anonymous and Boy Scouts that have asked when they can come back. They want to be safe and we want them to be safe, but it warmed my heart to hear our Administrative Board say that this is our ministry. Our ministry is to open our doors and to be a part of God’s work of transforming lives.

Jesus used the word glorify a lot in his prayer. Glorify means to make visible the presence of God. How can we make visible the presence of God this week? Not only to others, but to ourselves? Anne Lamott wrote about hope in National Geographic in 2018 in an article

called "Show Up With Hope". She said, "By showing up with hope to help others, I'm guaranteed that hope is present. Then my own hope increases. By creating hope for others, I end up awash in the stuff... Sometimes hope is a radical act, sometimes a quietly merciful response, sometimes a second wind, or just an increased awareness of goodness and beauty. Maybe you didn't get what you prayed for, but what you got instead was waking to the momentousness of life, the power of loving hearts. You hope to wake up in time to see the dawn, the first light, a Technicolor sunrise, but the early morning instead is cloudy with mist. Still, as you linger, the ridge stands majestically black against a milky sky. And if you pay attention, you'll see the setting of the moon that illumined us all as we slept. And you see a new day dawn." We are loved. Thanks be to God, Amen.