

JESUS PRAYS FOR YOU

John 17:1-11

Seventh Sunday of Easter (Series A)

May 21, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 17, verses 1 through 11. In this gospel lesson, Jesus lets us hear his prayer to the Father, and, in this prayer, we learn the desires of God. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 17, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “**Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**

⁶ “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the evening before Jesus' crucifixion, he prayed for you. This is one of the marks of a virtuous and loving person, that when they face their death, they think not of themselves, but of others. I don't know where my mind will be when I face my death. I suppose this is one of those things that we won't really know until we get there. But it is, of course, connected to how we live before death. If we think often of ourselves in the ordinary times of life, we will likely think of ourselves when we face death. If we think of others in the ordinary times of life, perhaps we will think of others when we face death. And if we think upon Christ in the ordinary times of life, and if we call upon him, we will be trained to think on him and call upon him in the hour of death.

I have, by the way, seen all of these. And I have seen all of these among Christians. When a person who thinks often of themselves faces death, especially if there is a period of suffering leading up to it, it can be a miserable experience. You may have seen this as well. And I'm not doubting anyone's salvation. I have seen this in those who confess faith in Christ, and, as far as I

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can tell, fell asleep in Jesus Christ. Their sin, just like the rest of ours, was paid for and forgiven by Christ. But there's a sad irony here, that the more we seek our own good in this life, the more miserable death is, because all that person can think about is their own suffering.

But for those who think of others, and especially those who think much upon Christ, the hour of death is a different experience. I still would not call it fun. But it's more noble and hopeful. There's a blessedness to it.

Jesus, when he faced death, had his mind on you. He prayed for you. All of chapter 17 is a prayer of Jesus. In the part we read today, Jesus prayed for his disciples. He prayed that the Father would keep them and unify them as one. But if we were to read on, we would see that Jesus is not just praying for them, but also for you and me. For the most part, I try to stay within the text for the day and leave the other parts for when they come up in the lectionary. But I want to peek ahead just a little bit so you can see that Jesus prayed for you. In verse 20 he says, **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."** That's you. When Jesus faced the hour of his death, his entire Church, even the part that didn't exist yet, was on his mind.

And, of course, it should not surprise us that the sinless Son of God was unselfish as he faced death. But we can and should still marvel at this. His death, for his own sake, was unnecessary. He could have avoided it. He did not have to go through the pain and agony. He did not have to experience the separation from his Father, nor the condemnation of God. But, all those things, he endured them for our sake. And so his mind was on you and his entire Church. So he willingly went forward to his death. And on the evening before his death, he prays for his Church.

We can learn a lot from the way Jesus prays here. There are several places in the gospels where Jesus prays. Sometimes he goes away by himself to pray. And we have no idea what he prayed in those moments. But in this instance, he is in the presence of his disciples, and he prayed out loud for them to hear. He wants them to hear and learn from his prayer. He also wants us to learn from it.

The same is, of course, true for the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus teaches us how to pray. And it's not just a how-to. This isn't just practical teaching about what we should pray for or how to get what we want when we pray. When Jesus prays, and when he teaches us to pray, he reveals the desires of God. He shows us the things that God cares about, and when we pray for those things that Jesus teaches us to pray for, we start to love those things too. This is how our desires are conformed to God's desires. This is how we learn to love and desire those things that are good. And when we learn to love and desire the things that God loves and desires, we will not be disappointed, because the good and gracious will of God is always accomplished.

Think for a moment of the Lord's Prayer. **"Our Father"** ... There are seven petitions in the prayer. Jesus teaches us what to ask for. And he teaches us to ask for these things, because these are the seven things our Father wants to give us. So don't think of the Lord's Prayer merely as a good prayer or a "how to pray." Think also of the Lord's Prayer as God's seven desires. These are the things he loves. These are the things he desires to do and give. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray for these seven things: **"Hallowed be your Name"** ... **"Your kingdom come"** ... **"Your will be done"** ... **"Give us our daily bread"** ... **"Forgive us our trespasses"** ... **"Lead us not into temptation"** ... and **"deliver us from evil."** It's not really a how-to. It reveals the heart of God. When we think and meditate on these petitions, we grow to see God's heart.

And in this prayer too, Jesus prays out loud for his disciples to hear, so that we can learn his heart.

The first thing Jesus states is the occasion, or the reason he is praying. **“Father, the hour has come”** (17:1). The “hour” he speaks of is the appointed time of his suffering and death. This is the hour for which Jesus came into the world, and now he must pass through it.

So Jesus prays, **“Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you”** (17:1). This might actually sound like a selfish prayer. Have you ever prayed, “God, please glorify me”? Probably not. I hope we’re not that careless in the presence of God. If you have, that was a bad idea. Don’t do it again. So it might sound selfish that Jesus prays for this. But it’s not. Think about this: what does it mean for God to glorify the Son, especially during this hour? The glory of Jesus is his cross. It’s his death. That’s the way it always is with saviors. A savior’s finest hour is the hour in which they save. For a firefighter, it’s when he rushes into a burning building to save a child. For a soldier or a police officer who is shot in the line of duty, that moment, as horrible as it may be, is also their greatest moment of glory, because that is the moment in which they demonstrate service, sacrifice, and love. So also for Jesus, the moment of his highest glory is his death. There are a few places earlier in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks of being lifted up from the earth (3:14-15; 8:28; 12:32). It sounds like a glorious and triumphant moment of exaltation. But as we get into the final chapters of the book, we realize that Jesus had been speaking of the cross the entire time. That is when he was lifted up from the earth. His death, despite the pain and shame, is his moment of glory. That’s what Jesus is praying for when he says, **“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”** He asks the Father to glorify him through the cross. His idea of glory is much different from ours.

Furthermore, we see that Jesus does this not for his own sake, but to glorify his Father and to give eternal life to those the Father has given to him. So notice how Jesus uses his authority. There is such a contrast between Jesus and the way authority is often exercised in this world. The authorities of this world exercise lordship over those under them. They make demands on those under them, and they extract service from them. That’s the temptation of authority in this world, to extract some kind of value from those under you. But this is a perversion of authority, and it is not what God instituted authority for. But Jesus has been given authority over all flesh, and he uses it to serve. With this authority, he lays down his life in order to give eternal life to all who know him as Savior.

This is what God desires, so this is what Jesus prays for, and this is what we should pray for and desire.

The big theme in this first part of the prayer is knowing God. Jesus says, **“This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”** (17:3). Now, what does that mean? It doesn’t mean that the total content of eternal life is simply knowing about God. Rather, Jesus is talking about how someone obtains eternal life. He’s talking about who has it. And it’s the person who knows God.

So Jesus came into the world to make God known. This is what it means that Jesus manifested the Name of his Father. That is, he revealed God. To manifest something means to make it known. But it’s more substantial than simply talking about the thing. Jesus revealed the Father by what he said. He taught the people his words. But to manifest God means more than just teaching. It means to embody it. It means to reveal it, not just in words, but also in his person and actions. He lived it. He demonstrated it. He manifested the Name of God to the world.

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The Name of God is his complete identity. It's who he is. We talk this way about someone having a good name. It doesn't mean that the words Micah or Sarah are superior to Daniel or Lydia. It's really about the person. Having a good name means that a person has a good reputation. The sum total of what is known about that person is positive. That's what it means to have a good name. And when we talk about the Name of God, we mean his complete identity. It's who he is. It's everything he has revealed about himself.

So when Jesus says that he has manifested the Father's Name, he means that, by his teaching and his actions, he has revealed to the world who God his Father is and what he is like. We know God through his Son Jesus Christ. It's like what Jesus said to Philip in chapter 14; we read this a few weeks ago: **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"** (14:9). The only way to know God is through Jesus Christ, because he is the one person of the Trinity who took on human flesh and showed himself to us.

So what do we see in Jesus? A healer? Yes. A miracle worker? Yes. A gentle and righteous God? Yes. But more than everything, we see a God who loved us by his death. We see a God who laid aside his life in order to serve us. We see a God who considers his creatures more important than himself. This is the nature of God, not just of Jesus Christ, but also of the Father and the Holy Spirit, because they share the same divine nature as Jesus. This is how Jesus has manifested the Name of God. He wants you to know that this is who God is.

So Jesus prays that the Father would keep them in this Name. Because to know God is to have eternal life. It's very similar to what Jesus teaches us to pray for in the Lord's Prayer: **"Hallowed by thy Name."** We pray that the Name of God, that is, the knowledge of him, would be kept holy among us. We pray that this knowledge of the saving God would be set apart. We pray that it would be held up, above all other knowledge, so that before we think of anything else, before we call upon anyone else for help, we would call upon the one true God and be saved. God's Name should be hallowed among us, so that, in the hour of death, and not just in death, but in every hour before then, we would call upon the Name of the Lord and be saved.

So this is how we know God: we know him through Jesus, his Son. And this is what we know about God: he is humble and gracious. He is all-powerful, and yet gentle. He is both just and loving. He serves those under his authority. He considers his creatures more important than his own life. He laid down his life for us, and he took it up again, and he ascended into heaven to reign forever as our King. To know this God is to have eternal life, so that where he is now, we also will be. Jesus prays for you, so that you will know this Name and have eternal life. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.