

Glory

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John 17:1-11

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, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 "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. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 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. 9 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. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 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.

DIAL A PRAYER

This week I read a story about a woman that was waiting to use a pay phone. (Apparently this story happened a while back since a pay phone is involved.) Anyway, while she was waiting a young man came up to her and said,

"Take this money and dial the phone number on this piece of paper - it will help you if you need help. If not, it will do you a lot of good to listen."

She was about to refuse because she thought that the young man was not well. But, when she noticed the tears in his eyes and the sincere tone of his voice, she took the money and told him she would make the call.

He said, "Thank you, Lady. I was about to do something foolish with my life but that number really saved me."

With that, the young man walked away.

The woman dialed the number and was just about to say hello when a voice answered and said,

"This is one of the ministers from Westminster Church responding to your Dial--A--Prayer request. Let us pray..."

You would think that this would put her off. But, she said that the tape recording of the minister's prayer was filled with such comfort and assurance that she could see why it brought such peace of mind to that troubled young man.

Even the words of a taped prayer can be of value.

I've prayed for people, and I know you have too. Sometimes in the hospital or the home we offer a word of prayer. And people have prayed for you and me.

It gives me great comfort when someone tells me that they are praying for me.

Once I got a card from a Methodist prayer group. They said that they had prayed for me at their last meeting. It came at a time of great sorrow in my life, and it meant a lot.

A PRAYER OVERHEARD

And that's what today's lesson is all about. Someone is praying for us. In today's lesson Jesus is praying for his disciples and he is praying for us.

These past few weeks we learned that the disciples felt uncertain about the future. Jesus was leaving them, and they didn't like it one little bit. Their hearts were troubled.

Jesus reassured these troubled disciples by assuring them that he was going to prepare a place for them, and that they would not be left alone. They would not be “orphaned”.

He had been their Advocate, the one who was with them and for them in thick and thin. And now they would receive another Advocate. God’s Spirit would be with them and in them.

Through the power of the Spirit the church would become a powerful witness to the gospel.

In today’s lesson Jesus prays for his disciples while they are present. Jesus wanted his disciples to overhear what he said in his prayer, and I think that he wants us to overhear this prayer as well.

GLORY

If I had to summarize Jesus’ prayer in one word, that word would be glory.

In the Old Testament the presence of God, the glory of God is overwhelming.

For example, when Moses beheld the glory of God at the burning bush and on the mountain it changed him. Even the reflected glory of God was too much to bear. The people asked Moses to veil his face so that this reflected glory would not overwhelm them.

Over and over again this lesson is taught in the Hebrew Scriptures.

God is above and beyond us. God is pure light. God is holy. God is totally different from us.

The people would not even speak the name of God because the name was holy. The name was too sacred to say out loud.

But, in the New Testament that vision of holiness changes.

Yes, God is above and beyond us. But, God chooses to come among us. God chooses to reveal Himself to us. Instead of a presence that invokes terror the glory of God becomes someone that we can embrace. It is the glory of God that reassures us and keeps us together.

The word “glory” and “glorify” are important words in John’s gospel.

In fact these words occur 42 times, a third of all references to glory in the New Testament. Some scholars divide John into two sections. They label Chapters 1-12 the Book of Signs, and they label chapters 13-21 the Book of Glory.

Suffice it to say that if you want to understand John’s gospel you have to understand glory.

When we think of the word “glory” we often think of boasting about honors and accolades. We think of good times, glory days when we were young and things were going our way.

But, the Bible defines glory in a different way.

Glory is not about us, and what we’ve done. Glory is about God, and what God has done. In fact according to the Shorter Catechism our number one job is to “glorify God.”

But, how do we do that? How do we glorify God?
Quite simply we glorify God by telling the truth about God.

And where do we find the truth about God? We find the truth about God in the Bible. We study God’s Word and learn the truth.

And that glorious truth about God is seen most clearly in the story of Jesus. Jesus is the human face of God.

To put it in the philosophical language of John’s gospel, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The creative Word of God took human form. The powerful Word behind the creation is a Word of compassion, forgiveness and hope that is eternal.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

Jesus begins his prayer by talking about what God is doing. Jesus prays, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.”

The “hour” refers to the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus. God and God’s Son will be glorified in what seems like to us a most unlikely way. How do we see the glory of God in what seems like such a tragedy?

The glory of God is not seen in the Passion and the crucifixion. The Passion and the crucifixion are due to the sinful and cruel nature of human beings.

But, God’s glory is seen in what God does with these terrible events. There is more to the crucifixion than just body broken and blood shed.

Jesus put it this way on the same night that he was betrayed. He took the bread and broke it and said, “This is my body, broken for you.” He took the cup and said, “This is my blood shed for you.”

When we were at our worst God was at His best. God took the ultimate symbols of betrayal and turned them into signs of hope and forgiveness. Instead of just a tragic death, the cross became a means of salvation.

When the world turned dark with sin, the light of God shone brightly on the cross as Jesus said, “Father forgiven them.” That was glory. God was glorified and the Son was glorified as well.

The cross was not an accident. The cross was the glory of God in action.

Just before Jesus died on the cross he said, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) And then the Bible tells us that Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

That doesn’t mean that Jesus gave up. That means through his death on the cross Jesus finished the work that his Father gave him to do here on earth.

We read something similar in verse 4 of our lesson for today. Jesus prayed, “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.”

THE GLORY OF RESURRECTION

But, what will happen to Jesus after he finishes the work of his Father on the cross? He will be glorified through the resurrection and the ascension.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians noted that Jesus humbled himself by becoming a human being and dying on a cross.

But, because Jesus humbled himself and finished the work that God gave him to do, God the Father lifted him up and made his name above every name. (See Philippians 2:5-11)

Through the resurrection and the ascension the process is reversed. The flesh becomes Word. Jesus is now in glory where it all began before the foundation of the world. And we have an Advocate in glory.

Remember, Jesus' prayer is meant to be overheard. Jesus wants his disciples (and us) to know that the cross was not a tragic accident. The cross demonstrates the sacrificial love of God, and the resurrection and the ascension demonstrate the redemptive power of that love.

When we pray the prayer of confession, I often use a declaration of pardon that incorporates all of these acts of glorification. I say, "Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, and Christ prays for us." (See Romans 8:34)

All this talk of glory might seem a bit esoteric until we realize that it's all *for us*. Body is broken *for us*. Blood is shed *for us*. Christ rose *for us*. Christ reigns in glory *for us*. Christ prays *for us*.

Some commentators refer to verses 1-5 of our lesson for today as Jesus' prayer for himself. I would say that this is Jesus' prayer about himself. Jesus is making the connection between himself and the Father explicit for the benefit of present and future disciples.

PRAYER SHAPED BY GLORY

Our prayers also need to be shaped by glory of the cross, the glory of the resurrection and the glory of the ascension. What would that look like? How might our prayers be different if we prayed keeping one eye on the glory of Jesus' life?

Perhaps it would mean that the focus of our prayers would not be so much about what we want or what we fear. It would be more a time to think about and praise what God has already done and already promised in Christ Jesus. Prayer would be a time to meditate upon the Word of God especially as that Word is revealed in Jesus Christ.

The one piece of advice that has helped me when it comes to prayer is this: Pray God's words back to Him. Find a systematic way to do a devotional study of the Bible (the These Days books in the narthex might help).

But, then take the Scripture passage for the day and write your own prayer based upon that Scripture passage. It's important that you write your own prayer and not just use a prayer that is given by someone else.

Keep a journal of your prayers. When you pray systematically using God's Word, prayer takes on a depth that is not possible otherwise. You are listening to what God has to say. Prayer becomes more of a conversation instead of just a meditation.

Our lesson for today, this prayer of Jesus gives the disciples assurance.

The disciples will not be left alone when Jesus leaves the world. On the contrary, they are given the power to carry on the work of the Kingdom.

And this power comes through the "words" that Jesus gave them. Jesus said that the Father gave him the words of eternal life and now those same words have been entrusted to the disciples.

More than that, the disciples had a relationship with Jesus that changed them. They knew that Jesus came from God. And now a bit of that glory has rubbed off on the disciples. Now they glorify God and Jesus through their ministry.

And it is this shared sense of God's glory that brings the disciples together. Jesus says in his prayer that they are under God's protection and that they are "one" even as Jesus and his Father are one.

A WAR OF WORDS

The great threat to the church lies in adopting the words of our culture instead of adopting the words of Jesus. It is our job in the church to clearly define how we are different from the world.

Jesus knew that it would be hard for these disciples to live by his words. The world would always offer a competing word, and often the world would sometimes try to enforce that word with the sword. They needed to be protected.

If we think of protection as the absence of pain and suffering then the prayer of Jesus for his disciples failed. The disciples and those who followed them in the faith were often persecuted for their faith. It was (and sometimes still is) a dangerous thing to truly follow Jesus. It is still tempting to compromise with the ways of the world.

When Jesus prayed for the protection of his disciples, he wasn't praying that Peter and his brothers would be successful in their fishing business. He wasn't praying that Matthew would make even more money and be elected tax collector of the year.

He was praying that the disciples would remain faithful to his way and his word. He was praying that instead of lording it over others they would learn to serve others in his name.

He was praying that the glory of body broken and blood shed might be seen in their manner of life. He was praying that they too would learn to deny themselves, take up a cross and follow the way of Jesus.

UNITY IN THE WORD OF GLORY

Unity in the church is not based upon being a part of the same denomination or the same form of church government. Unity in the church is based upon taking the Word of God seriously, having a personal relationship with Christ, and giving glory to God.

And that phrase, “giving glory to God” simply means worshipping God.

We do not come to church to “get our batteries charged” or find the spiritual key that gives us what we want. We do not come to church to listen to good music or hear a great speaker.

We come to church to worship God and meditate upon God’s Word.

We might use different means to accomplish those goals. We might use music or liturgy or sermons or art, but we must not confuse the means with the message. It is the message, the Word of God that connects us to the Almighty and to each other.

If we take that away, if we say that the words don’t matter then we have no connection with God. And we have no connection with each other.

The disciples needed Jesus to pray for them. They will soon face significant opposition and persecution. But, the one thing, the only thing that would reassure them and protect them in this dangerous world would be their connection to the Word of God as revealed in Jesus.

And this is the one thing that reassures and protects us as well.

In one sense the Christian message is very simple. “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” Our little children know and sing those words.

But, as we grow older we are tempted to leave the simplicity of this message behind. Sometimes, even without realizing it, we seek salvation in other things and other ideas.

The Good News which John spells out in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel is that the Risen Christ continues to pray for us, continues to foresee our unity when all we can see is division and despair.

In the meantime his words continue to change the world in wonderful ways.

Karoline Lewis asked an intriguing question, “What if we imagined the resurrection of Jesus was just the beginning and not the conclusion of the Gospel ... that the promises of resurrection are, in part, ours to fulfill?” Suppose we trusted in the promise Jesus gave his disciples a few Sundays

ago, the incredible promise that those who believe in him would do even greater works?

This is the last Sunday of Eastertide, but this is not the last Sunday that we will witness the power of the resurrection. We are in the world for a reason, and it is to proclaim the power and promise of God's Word.

Greater things are coming. Today Jesus prays for you and for me.

He prays that we will remember his words and trust in his grace. And in his words we find the very glory of God. In His words we will find eternity.

Amen.