



Sermon, August 28, 2016
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Come Meet Jesus
“A Priestly Prayer”

Scripture: John 17:1-26

17:1 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. **12** While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. **13** But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. **14** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. **15** I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. **17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, **21** that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

25 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. **26** I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Opening: What Jesus didn't say, and what he did say

Chapters 13-17 of the Gospel of John are some of the most poignant chapters in the entire Bible. Jesus is only hours away from a sham trial in which he will be beaten, whipped, spit upon and finally hung on a cross to suffer an excruciatingly tortuous and drawn-out death. Knowing all this (or surmising what might be yet to come), he gathers together his closest associates for a meal and one last conversation with them. Certainly he knew that, given what lay ahead, the words he was about to share with them would be forever seared into the consciousness of each person there.

What is interesting is not only what he did say, but also what he didn't say. He didn't urge his followers to erect a big statue to his memory, nor to go out and establish a global religious empire. He didn't urge them to take up arms and overthrow the Roman occupation army. He didn't admonish them to become successful business entrepreneurs or to pursue their own dreams of fame and fortune. What he told them, instead, is to love one another. With death tapping on his shoulder, he commanded them to love.

The kind of life-laying-down that Jesus practiced and commanded his followers to practice can only come from people whose lives that are so connected and intertwined with one another that the ultimate goal and overriding concern of each person is the welfare of the other person, and the commitment to do whatever is needed to ensure that their welfare is achieved, even to the point of their own death.

Jesus says to live in such deep connection with one another and him that they become like one living vine, drawing from the same source of life. This intense interconnectedness is best described as *inter-abiding*, and is nothing less than the entry point into direct communion with God: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” This is the word we are to keep: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

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It is impossible to overstress the centrality of this commandment. The life of a follower of Jesus Christ should be marked by this one characteristic, and this alone: love for others. When Jesus said, “Believe in me,” he didn’t mean to give our intellectual assent to some theological formula, or to say some magical phrase like “Jesus is my Lord and Savior.” No, he meant that we are to place our trust in him so completely that we continue his mission, because his life and his love are literally flowing through us, because we are so deeply connected to him, and to one another. This kind of Jesus-breathed love does not separate the world into believers and non-believers. It does not stand along the road carrying signs that says Jesus hates anybody. It does not proclaim that God is on anybody’s side over against anybody else. It does not bring children into the world only to allow them to starve or to withhold the means to receive medical care. John underscores this in his first letter: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17).

Jesus has said all this to his disciples, and to us. Now, having said all this, he seals his words with what can only be described as a High Priestly Prayer. There are three main things to take home from this prayer:

Verse 3: “*And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”

We have knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ (through the Holy Spirit) and *this is eternal life*. I’m fond of quoting Frederick Ward Kates: “The purpose of... the Christian religion – is not to get you into heaven, but to get heaven into you.” (<http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Frederick-Ward-Kates/1/index.html>.) This is what Jesus is talking about. He came to bring to us the life that is eternal, rooted and grounded in that which is eternal, and that life begins the moment we turn our hearts and minds toward God. Jesus came to show us God, to introduce us to God. God is not far away, up yonder some place. God is here, close at hand, ever accessible.

Verses 15-17: “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the

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world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

As we are removed from the world’s systems, we are sanctified, rendered more holy, by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Last week, we talked about living by a new set of rules, rules grounded in the truth about who we are in relation to who God is. That is what *sanctification* is all about. Now, I might be using a strange sounding word here for some of you: “sanctification.” Sanctification simply means this: allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us, gradually changing us into the likeness of Christ. It means having the “mind of Christ,” as Paul calls it in his Letter to the Philippians.

But the struggle against the old way, the old life, the way of the world continues.

Verses 21-23: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Did you notice that very important preposition we talked about a few weeks back? What is it? “In.” Let’s enact this part of the prayer using hand motions:

- As you, Father, are in me
- and I am in you
- may they also be in us
- The glory that you have given me
- I have given them
- so that they may be one
- as we are one
- I in them
- and you in me
- that they may become completely one...

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How did you like that? It's sort of like a dance, isn't it? Some of the early church leaders said that that was exactly what happens with God: that God the Father dances with God the Son dances with God the Holy Spirit, and this dancing God dances with us in the same way, Jesus dancing in us by dancing in the Holy Spirit which is dancing in us helping us to dance with the Father, and so on. They used a special word for it: *perichoresis*. (I know you don't always like these fancy Greek words, but the point is, Jesus is talking about the dance of life, the foxtrot of faith, the square dance of salvation, the rumba of relationship.) It is in this dance that we are able to love as God loves.

Thomas Merton explains it this way: “When you and I become what we are really meant to be, we will discover not only that we love one another perfectly but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ. We will see that it is He Who loves in us.... Love comes out of God and gathers us to God in order to pour itself back into God through all of us and bring us all back to Him on the tide of His own mercy. So we all become doors and windows through which God shines back into His own house.” (Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 1972, New Directions Paperbook, pp. 65, 67.)

God is calling us to dance together – with one another and with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. We don't have to know all the steps, because the Spirit will teach us, will dance in us and through us. So, don't stand against the wall, get out on the floor, and let's boogie down!