

John 17:1-11a

After Jesus had spoken these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you. ²For you gave him authority over all flesh, so that he may give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. ⁴I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵Now, Father, glorify me at your own side with the glory I had at your side before the world existed.

⁶“I revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have held on to your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me, and they received them. They learned the truth that I came from you. They believed that you sent me.

⁹“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All that is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine. And I am glorified in them. ¹¹I am no longer going to be in the world, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.”

Glorified

I.

Following his instructions did not seem to be their strong suit. In the past, they always seemed to take things the way they wanted to hear them rather than actually listen to the words he was saying to them. To be sure, some things *did* sink in, but it always seemed their first course of action had been to go their own way; to do things *their* way, rather than *his* way; to get only half the message, if that.

All of a sudden, they were following his instructions to the letter. If you were at the Ascension service, you heard Jesus’ closing words to his disciples before he blessed them and ascended visibly into heaven before their eyes. He said: “Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, EHV). What the Father promised was the Holy Spirit; that was the power from on high the disciples would receive.

Notice the action Jesus told them to take: “stay in the city.” Wait. The Seventh Sunday of Easter has sometimes been called “Waiting Sunday.” Hindsight tells us that there were ten days between Jesus’ ascension and Pentecost, when the promised Holy Spirit was sent to the disciples. In the moment, however, they didn’t know *how* long it would be. They just heard “wait.”

And wait they did. Today’s First Reading tells us: “When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying... ¹⁴All of them kept praying together with one mind” (Acts 1:13-14, EHV). They went back to the city, as Jesus had instructed them. They spent their time preparing as best they could. They were praying. They considered how best to replace Judas the betrayer from among the other followers of Jesus. That’s it. That was the only action they took. They waited—as Jesus had told them to do.

Perhaps as they waited they thought back to the time Jesus spoke today’s Gospel, which is our text for today. As Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father, six times in eleven verses he used the word “glory” or “glorify.” The prayer Jesus prayed he prayed on Holy Thursday—the night he was betrayed—the night before his trials before Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate.

In the days before Jesus' ascension, sometimes the disciples had *sought* glory. Earlier in Jesus' ministry they enjoyed the spotlight of being disciples of the One thought of as a great Rabi, or teacher. Sometimes they argued about which of them might be the greatest in the kingdom some day (Luke 22:24). They coerced relatives to ask whether it might be possible to be on Jesus right and left hands, his most trusted associates, so to speak (Matthew 20:20-21).

As they continued waiting in the city, thinking back to the prayer Jesus prayed that mentioned glory so many times, they also realized that "glory" didn't necessarily mean what they had originally thought it meant. Well, maybe it did—ultimately—but in the here and now it didn't mean what they had thought.

II.

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1, EHV). Nobody living at the time Jesus spoke these words thought of crosses as glorious. They were the electric chair. They were lethal injection. They were the guillotine. They were designed for nothing less than execution. In no way was it desirable to be someone who was sentenced to die on a cross. It was the most *in*-glorious way to die anyone could possibly imagine.

"The time has come." Judas would soon betray Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Trials before Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate would follow. The crowds, urged on by the religious establishment, would chant, "Crucify! Crucify!" Jesus would hang ingloriously on the executioner's cross.

Jesus didn't shirk that destiny. Inglorious as it would seem to anyone watching, Jesus knew that, in reality, the cross was glory. "Glorify your Son."

Why would the cross be such a glorifying thing? "For you gave him authority over all flesh, so that he may give eternal life to all those you have given him... 'I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do' (John 17:2, 4, EHV). It was on the cross that Jesus finished the work God the Father had given him to do—the most important work ever done in the world. There, on the inglorious cross, Jesus paid for all the sins of everyone who ever lived. There Jesus cried out "It is finished."

Jesus prayed this prayer *before* he gave that victorious, glorious cry from the cross, but he speaks of his work as an already accomplished fact. He is confident of final success and final glory. It is as sure and certain as if God, himself had proclaimed it—and, of course, he had.

Think about what Jesus was saying: the thing that brings the greatest glory to God is to save mankind from their sins. The human race had abandoned God. They had come up with such twisted ideas of glory that they thought their glory was in being great—in comparing themselves with other human beings—in falsely elevating their own positions. The greatest glory for God is to bring back these miscreants and malcontents.

As inglorious as the cross might have looked to bystanders, Jesus hanging from that cross was the most glorious event in all of history. There the work of salvation was completed. There the disobedient work of Adam was undone by the obedient, glorious work of Jesus.

"Now, Father, glorify me at your own side with the glory I had at your side before the world existed" (John 17:5, EHV). Unlike the disciples who had in the past jockeyed for position in the kingdom, Jesus is not seeking personal reward. Jesus, as God, had the glory of God from all eternity. Being once again exalted to the side of God the Father brings glory to the Heavenly Father and his plan of salvation. Future believers would have life in his

name.

III.

“I revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have held on to your word” (John 17:6, EHV). The name of God means more than just some words that stand for God, it is everything we know about him. That means God’s name also teaches us what he has done for us.

God’s plan of salvation had been revealed to his disciples. They had to go through a learning process. At times they didn’t understand. At times they doubted. As he prayed this prayer, Jesus knew that times of doubt lay ahead for them, even after his resurrection. But they held on. Tenuously at times, but they held on for dear life; for *eternal* life.

You and I hold on to God’s Word for our eternal life. “Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me, and they received them. They learned the truth that I came from you. They believed that you sent me” (John 17:7-8, EHV). Even the faith we have in the glorious work Jesus did on the cross comes from God. It is not logical to believe in our Savior. Faith is purely a gift of the Holy Spirit.

IV.

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, because they are yours” (John 17:9, EHV). At other times Jesus *did* pray for the unbelieving world. In *this* prayer, however, he is praying for believers.

“I am no longer going to be in the world, but they are still in the world” (John 17:11, EHV). Jesus was looking ahead to the time after his ascension. He would no longer be in the world to protect his disciples in the same way he had while with them physically. There is so much pressure on Christians to reject Jesus—to turn away from the glory of the cross. Jesus wanted to pray specifically for the Eleven who remained his close disciples as well all those who would come to believe in him. We are still in the world. Each of us faces the opposition of unbelief.

It is important to Jesus that his followers persevere. “All that is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine. And I am glorified in them” (John 17:10, EHV).

Jesus doesn’t send his gospel message out on the wings of angels. He doesn’t open the heavens and send it down on lightning bolts. Jesus is glorified in you and me. He is glorified as we proclaim the message he left us.

That’s why he prays for us, who are still in the world after he has gone back into heaven to prepare our place there. He prays for us that we would be bold and confident as we live our lives of faith. He prays for us that we would not quiver and quake in our boots when facing the fierce opposition of unbelief. He prays that we would be the willing messengers of his gospel in the 21st Century, just as those early disciples who were still waiting for the special power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had told them to do.

Here we are, Lord. Send us. God grant that our Lord Jesus would be glorified in us. Amen.