



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Who hears a prayer?” **Sermon on John 17:1-11**

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Seventh Sunday of Easter

Time in the Gospel of John is blurred. Past, present, and future are all mixed into one. Jesus is praying for us. Right now. Listen, John 17:1-11, and hear the Word of God.

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, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. “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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 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.

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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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.

So much of the time, the prayer of Jesus is a secret, those words between Jesus and God. What did he pray? We don't know.

Scripture says, “At his baptism, Jesus was praying.” What did he pray? We don't know.

Scripture says that before choosing the 12 disciples, Jesus “continued all night in prayer.” What did he pray? We don’t know.

Scripture says that Jesus took James and John up the mountain to pray. What did he pray? We don’t know.

The disciples found Jesus alone praying. What did he pray? We don’t know.

I have a list of scriptures when Jesus was seen praying, but what he prayed, we don’t know.

But today, we know. Some prayer! He prayed it loudly enough that it traveled over sixty years before John wrote it down in his Gospel. The prayer he prayed has swept across the centuries, flown across the ocean, over the Piedmont, and through the Smokies, until it landed in our ears this morning.

The prayer doesn’t age. Any more than love gets old. The prayer is his passion. It is God’s deepest desire. Jesus wants to be heard by God. Of course he does! We all do. But he wants us to hear it, too. He wants us to hear him say, “...Holy Father, protect them.”

Do you need any help understanding what he’s talking about? Here’s what he’s not talking about - as an adult, whenever I would leave my mother and father to fly back home, I was given the instruction, “Call us when you get home.” That’s a prayer. And she is going to continue to pray all night long until I call. There’s something about love that worries about life, and travel, and going up in flying tin cans, and “Father protect him.... Call us when you get home!” That’s love. It knows life is fragile and needs all the help it can get. But as I said, I don’t think that’s what Jesus was praying about.

“Holy father, protect them....” “Holy Father, protect them being something they are not. I pray they stay in the fold. That they know who they are and whose they are.”

I remember the family gathering that I was called into. Grandma had died; she lived a long and good life into her 90s. We gathered to plan the service which means stories were told. The daughter said, “I remember as teenagers on Saturday night, all of us would pile into Dad’s work van. As we headed out the door, Mom would say, “Remember our name is on the van.” “Miller’s Dry Cleaning.”

What she was saying was, “Our name is on the van, don’t embarrass the family.” What she was saying was, “Remember who you are.” What she was saying was, “Don’t be tempted to be something you’re not.” We are the SHEEP of his pasture, but we can stray.

Jesus taught us to pray it, “Lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil.” Holy father protect them!

Think for a moment, what are some things that keep you from being a Christian? I’ve a list that keep me from being a Christian. When I start talking about politics, the fruit of the spirit tends to rot on the shelf. I’m not a Christian. What are some things that keep you from being a Christian? I have a list. When I start getting concerned about “My own precious time,” I don’t feel very Christian. When I’m looking at my bank account, my money, my desires, when I have

so little time for those “bless their little heart” people. When I think, “They made the mess, they should clean it up,” I’m not being a Christian. Have you got a list?

If you don’t have a list, make an appointment with me, and I’m sure I can help you find a few things. Because, let me tell you, you have a list! Now that doesn’t sound very Christian of me; I should probably add that to my list.

Better though, I think, to put all that behind us and hear the prayer. “Holy Father, protect them.” If Jesus has a list for us, it is just one thing. “Love one another, just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.”

“Father, protect them in that effort...” Don’t let them get sidetracked. Don’t let them get sucked into listening to all the loud voices of hatred. Don’t let them hear the sound of the devil; “Bow down and worship me.” Jesus is praying for us right now! LISTEN! “Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

Did anyone hear the prayer? It is the deepest desire of God.

“I do want to be one with you. I want you to be one with me. I want you to be one with one another.” God has prayed the prayer ever since he took a handful of dirt and blew his spirit into us and created us in the image of God. Every single one of us. Look at each other, and you see something of God... Protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one.

The prayer is God’s deepest desire, listen! “Hear O Israel! You are to love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

The prayer of being one... What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humble with your Lord. Together....one.

Somehow, we’ve gotten on a kick in the so-called church that being one is being of the same mind...not of Christ Jesus...but the same mind about where we draw the line. “Everyone is welcome except for those conservative, narrow-minded, basket of deplorable evangelicals.” Or the prayer is, “Lord, I’m grateful that you bathed us in purity.” So silly! Well, you have to draw the line somewhere. Quit worrying about the speck in your neighbor’s eye... you have a log I tell you in your eye! Listen...

“Once upon a time, two men went up to the temple to pray, one said, ‘I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. It’s just you and me God. We’re one!’ But the other man would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” Did you hear the prayers? Two prayers.

Where do you draw the line? Is one in and the other out? Or did you listen to the prayer? I mean really listen to the prayer.

For surely, if you listen, one has a prayer that says, “God have mercy on me. I’m a mess. I’m trying to put food on my table. And I’m sorry Lord, I’ve had to sell my character and my integrity. My family has to eat. I look in the mirror, and I don’t even know who that person is. Heal me. I just need to be loved.”

And, if you really listen in on the other prayer, I think you'll hear, "Look! Lord, I fast twice a week. Look! Lord, I give a tenth of my income. Look! Lord, I'm good. Right? I mean, compared to most. I'm giving it my all. Lord, do you notice? Have you checked my giving statement? Look, Lord, I'm loved. Right?"

Do we really have to choose one over the other? "Thank God I'm not a pious jerk!" "Thank God I'm not a cheater and liar." When at the table of Jesus Christ, we must remember that Jesus died for all. What's killing the so-called church is that it dispenses love with an eye dropper... a little bit for a few.

When Cane killed his brother Abel, it was because he thought there wasn't enough love to go around.

Jesus so wants us to hear his prayer! Our ears are open.... All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ...Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." Who hears the prayer? God.

Today, we are installing, someone needs to work on a better verb... we install mufflers. We are installing Sarah as our Associate Pastor for Faith Formation, and I know that if we're really quiet, we can hear her prayer. "Father, protect them. May they be one, as we are one!"

Sarah wants to give her heart for this place. She wants to offer her gifts and have them be received as gifts. I hear she wants to conduct weddings and funerals, because you're right in the heart and soul of the church, and what a gift it is to share words about a life. To hold them up and see them sparkle, the light of Christ shining through. "What a gift she was." "What a treasure he was." She wants a place that her family can call home. She wants a place where she isn't just doing a job, but is part of a community of love and can bring her gifts that we don't have.

It's a scary thing to become a pastor. You don't know what you're getting. Pastors hear horror stories, and they live horror stories. But that is not here! We are people who hear the voice of the shepherd, we hear the prayer, and we live the prayer. She has a prayer. We have a prayer!

"Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." And all God's people said, "Amen!"

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