



**LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

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Prayer For You

**John 17: 1-11**

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Many of you know that earlier this year, I was in Scotland with Aidan when my mother became sick. We spent 2 weeks sitting at her hospital bed. During the second week, when things had taken a downward turn, on the drive home one evening after a day by her bed, Aidan turned to me and asked. Dad, what are you praying for? I knew what he was asking. It was a very appropriate question for that time. We had a good conversation on what we were praying for.

It is a question that has stuck with me. It is a good question for any day, “What are you praying for?” On this day, what am I praying for? What are you praying for?

When I was 14 years old, and God was starting to whisper in my ear that there may be some truth to this Gospel I was hearing, the leader of the church Bible Class, which I had to go to get a badge in the Boys Brigade, (kind of like the Scouts,) asked us if we had ever tried praying. Most of us chuckled in response. I mean who prays? He challenged us to try prayer and see what God would do. Later that week, was the Boys Brigade Table tennis competition and I got to the final. I had played the guy in the final quite a few times and he always beat me. We had the table set up in the church hall and just before the game was about to start, I excused myself. This guy thought I was going to the bathroom, which I did, but I went there to pray. Something I had never done before. I still remember laying down some kind of fleece before God saying OK, God, that guy

told me to try praying. If there is something to all of this, allow me to win this game. A really mature first prayer. But that was my deal with God. Not only did I beat him, I smashed him. I have believed ever since that God honored that simple immature theologically unsound prayer from a kid that nothing of faith to draw me in.

I also remember being at a meeting when a few people laid hands on me for healing to the point, I was in tears and... nothing. I don't know why. God is sovereign, I know that and we cannot manipulate God, but can we influence God through prayer?

There is a mystery that I embrace surrounding prayer. We could spend time thinking on how Jesus teaches us to pray, on how prayer helps align us with God, brings peace and hope, how prayer helps grow close to God, how it gives us a moment to pause and listen to God, how prayer allows us to praise God. There are a lot of sermons there.

One thing is for sure, however we unravel the mysteries of prayer, Jesus sets us the example of taking time to pray to be with God. Time and time again we see Jesus in prayer, quite often he retreats to be on his own, but in today's lectionary reading from the Gospel of John, we find Jesus praying in the company of the disciples, where they can hear him.

This is the last Sunday of Easter, next week is Pentecost. One of the cool things about the easter season is that we get to go back to the days leading up to Easter, perhaps allowing us to think about it from the viewpoint of the disciples. The passage picks up soon after the discourse that John provides during the Last Supper, they seem to move through the Kidron Valley, probably on the way to Gethsemane. This

prayer often called Jesus High Priestly prayer takes the whole of chapter 17 of John and the lectionary breaks it up into 3 sections and presents each section in year A B and C. This is year A, so we read the first part of Jesus prayer. In this first section of the prayer, Jesus prays for himself and then prays for his disciples. There is a section later in the prayer that we do not cover today where Jesus prays for all believers. I encourage you to read the whole chapter for context when you get an opportunity. Though this section of the prayer focuses on Jesus' prayer for himself and those disciples that were immediate to him, there is still much we can glean from his words.

When verse 1 says "After Jesus had spoken these words" it refers to Jesus comforting the disciples about his departure, promising the Holy Spirit, and warning them that the world would reject them for their faith. Then Jesus prays. *"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."* I read this week that in those days, "glory" often implied a visible manifestation of a divine presence. So, when Jesus asks the Father to "Glorify your Son," in the gospel of John, He is pointing toward the cross, he wants God's salvation plan to be seen. Our modern interpretation of "glory" being praise and celebration for superiority is at odds with Jesus asking God to glorify Him, for Jesus, the cross *is* the ultimate display of God's love. In this meaning of glory, this sacrificial act reveals God's love and the divine calling and purpose of Jesus. Jesus asks for this glory so that He can, in turn, glorify the Father.

That does lead us to reflect on those times when we receive praise and glory that should be redirected to God. How do we who sometimes enjoy that praise find ways to redirect that spotlight onto God. Looking back, I

don't think that 14 year old kid who won a table tennis tournament gave much praise to God for indulging his naïve prayer.

Jesus goes on to say that he is glorified now by finishing the work God gave him to do on earth, which again points to the cross and asks to be glorified in God's presence as he was before the world existed.

There is also a wonderful definition of eternal life in Jesus' prayer. After he prays that God allowed him to give eternal life to all whom God had given him, Jesus says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

It's a different definition of eternal life than what we are used to. And it's fundamentally defined by relationships. Relationships with God and Jesus himself. We know Jesus heard the question, what can I do to gain eternal life in his earthly ministry. Here in John Jesus provides an answer. In our theology, we often set up certain conditions to receive eternal life. In this prayer, Jesus conditions are all about relationships. *And this is eternal life, he says, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* Eternal life is knowing the only true God and Jesus himself.

this leads us to ask, what does it mean to know God. I would suggest for us knowing God draws us into a worldview and way of living in which we will be shaped by God's vision for love and justice and grace. And that can be realized in relationships and communities right now.

How do we know that we know God? Knowing God will be evident in our obedience to love. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. So, if eternal life is knowing God and knowing God is sharing God's

values of love and justice and grace, we are not waiting to die to experience for eternal life, we are in it right now. We do these things now.

Jesus then goes on to pray for his disciples. There is a lovely little line in verse 6 that may give us a glimpse of how Jesus looks upon us. Jesus prays, "They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." They kept your word. This is in spite of what we know about the disciples, for example, in John 14:8-9, Philip asks to see the God, showing he didn't realize God was standing right in front of him. In Matthew 16:21-23, Peter rebukes Jesus for saying he must die. In Mark 10:35-41, James and John ask Jesus for positions of power, showing they misunderstood salvation, Thomas does not believe Jesus has risen, and I am sure there are other examples. Yet Jesus says of them, "They have kept your word." That is what he remembers, that is how he sees them. He wasn't looking for perfection; he was looking for faithful followers that knew how to love him and each other. He didn't see the mistakes, he saw the faith and desire to follow, how comforting is that for us to know that is how Jesus sees us. Jesus doesn't need you to be perfect. Jesus needs you to be faithful, to follow and to love.

His prayer for his disciples led to one thing which is revealed in verse 11. *Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

So that they may be one. Jesus wanted his disciples to be united. This prayer is in the context of Jesus leaving his disciples to carry out the work of taking the Gospel to the world. He knew it was a divided world then and they would need God's protection. And he knew for them to be successful, they must be united in their mission. We know about a divided world, do we not? A divided country? But what divides us is not

more important than what unites us, and what unites us is this mission Jesus left his disciples. None of our differences must get in the way of sharing the Gospel with love and grace.

I'll end with this; Jesus prays for His disciples and later for all believers. How do you feel about the idea that Jesus is praying for you? Romans 8:34 says, "*Who is to condemn? It is Christ<sup>[1]</sup> who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*"

That is who Jesus prays for now. His church. The ones God has given him. You. Today Jesus sits at God's right hand and intercedes for you. I still don't know that I understand the mystery of prayer, but Jesus sets the example. Our response must be to follow that example, as Jesus prays for us, let us take time with God, to pray for each other, to listen, to meditate, to ask that God be glorified in how we live.

I leave you with Aidan's question for me. Perhaps to all of us.

What are you praying for?

Amen.