

A 7 Easter 2026
Saint Barnabas Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev David Rider
May 17, 2026

John 17:1-11

In today's reading from John's Gospel, we listen in on the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus to his heavenly Father

In this moving passage, placed near the great events of Ascension and Pentecost, we experience the final earthly words of Jesus to God and to his disciples

Our Lord has entered into human history to teach, proclaim, nurture and heal

Now, it is time to set his sights upon the heavenly kingdom and depart from those whom he loved

Poised between heaven and earth and already in ascent to glory, Jesus speaks simultaneously as still in the world and yet no longer of it

In the words that remind us of a heavenly conversation, Jesus turns to the Father as he offers a benediction upon the entire human family

Jesus no doubt was tapping into a tradition that goes back to Moses' departure in the Hebrew Book of Deuteronomy

In Moses' day, at the end of the earthly journey it was common for a farewell speech to close with a prayer for the speaker's children and others who would be left behind

A deathbed blessing (or curse) would have a powerful, lifetime impact on one's successors

When Moses prepared to meet Yahweh, he, too, turned from the people to address the heavens

Only then did Moses look back to bless the twelve tribes of Israel

I'm sure that Jesus felt this holy connection to Moses, and yet he went one step further

Jesus already seems to speak from heaven and beyond the grave, even though his speech—in a historic sense—came just before the crucifixion

Jesus already has transcended the limits of time and space, and he assumes the glorified role as our heavenly intercessor

In some mysterious way, the prayer itself is the ascension of Jesus: in its intimacy and power, it is truly the prayer of the hour

With John's human anthropology in mind, the New Testament language of "grace" takes on new meaning

God is the ultimate patron whose resources are graciously given and mediated through Jesus as the broker

Some 41 times in John's gospel (cf. once/twice in Matthew and Mark) we learn that God "sent" Jesus as His ambassador and mediator to this world

Some 11 times in today's passage alone (count them after the sermon, not during it), God "gives" to Jesus goods and services to pass along to God's people

In the midst of Jesus' final earthly words and in the shadow of the Cross and his glorification, what meaning shall we take from this powerful passage?

First, let's remember that the Greco/Roman patronage system of honor/shame may sound dated, but it continues in subtle forms to this very day

Our consumer culture remains completely obsessed with products and psychological favors that others bestow upon us—a fact that fuels an entire advertising industry

Jesus' glorification remains a key theological foundation of John's Gospel

In other words, he does not manipulate his disciples to bolster his self-esteem or derive a sense of petty power over others

In this prayer to God, Jesus fully understands that glorification comes only from heaven and leads not to ego inflation but to the hard wood of the Cross

One of the great, cosmic ironies of the Gospel results from God's bestowing honor and glorification on Jesus precisely when the world will shame him, spit in his face, and nail him to the Cross

By empowering the disciples (which we will address more fully in next Sunday's celebration of Pentecost) Jesus now turns the brokerage role over to the apostles and the witnessing community

On this final Sunday of the Easter season, we celebrate the identity that Jesus seals for us on the Cross and through his glorification

Today's story actually takes place just before the events of Good Friday

Whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke do not jump ahead to the resurrection, John assumes this conclusion from the start of his Gospel

Jesus speaks confidently as the victor through his intimate relationship with the Father

In John's Gospel (cf. the Synoptics), Jesus does not sweat or pray to avoid suffering, but jubilantly anticipates his glorification and return to his heavenly Father

Rather than evoking separation anxiety with the disciples, Jesus bestows the same unity he has enjoyed with God upon you and me

Jesus' leave-taking becomes a joyous climax, not a ruinous defeat

Through his blessing, we become stewards of this victorious legacy through baptism: this holy power fuels our contact with—and service to—God's world around us

Living as the resurrection community, therefore, presumes—yea, demands—that we live in the same unity with each other that Jesus enjoyed with his heavenly Father

Jesus does not say it would be a nice idea if we considered living in unity

Rather, Jesus prays to God, "protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one"

This mandate becomes a key benchmark to our fidelity to the Gospel

Anything short of this high bar risks a mockery of everything for which Jesus stood and for which he gave his life

Our ability to wage unity—not make-nice superficiality, but commitment to holy community—becomes a sign of faithful witness to Jesus

One final, critical theme flows from today's leave-taking witness

In Jesus' glorification—in his death/resurrection—Jesus clearly spells out the ultimate gift that is granted to us by faith

In spite of our human proclivities to squander God's blessing, God grants us—in Christ—"eternal life"

Among the four gospel writers, John most clearly articulates the meaning of eternal life, and it has nothing exclusively to do with pie-in-the-sky or postmortem existence

Lest there be any doubt, today Jesus states the meaning of eternal life as clearly as anyone can state it: **"This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"**

Eternal life takes place right here and now amid the blessings, stressors and distractions of daily living

Like the oxygen we breathe, eternal life surrounds us and keeps us fully alive, not by escaping into some mystical cloud, but by experiencing God's redeeming, loving presence with every breath and fiber of our being

Jesus tells his Father, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them"

Are you living your life as though Jesus Christ is glorified in you?

Jesus' prayer serves as the best definition I know of the holy life to which we are called
Live each day as though Christ is glorified in you

Unify each estranged relationship with parishioner or with mother until it has some hope of mirroring the unity that Jesus and his heavenly Father share, even in the shadow of the Cross

Allow our love for each other, our unity in Christ, to serve as an icon—as God's gift—to this fragile world we serve

“All mine are yours,” Jesus says to God, “and yours are mine”

Next time someone truly bugs you, truly gets under your skin (present company excepted, of course) remember this high priestly prayer as Jesus leaves this earthly world and passes the baton to us

These final words of Jesus offer us no escape from worldly tensions, simply divine protection

Divine protection, divine presence and Christian fellowship that equip us for ministry in a world that feels dangerous and unrelenting at times

As we work to make real the unity that God demands of us, as we give thanks for the uplift of Ascension and anticipate the holy downdraft of Pentecost, let us pray that God will

Take our minds and think through them; take our lips and speak through them; take our hearts, and set them on fire.