

# **“The Prayer Jesus Lived”**

**John 17:1-11**

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## **Seventh Sunday of Easter**

The entire seventeenth chapter of John is a prayer. In a modern setting though, it also reads like an exit interview. There is, after all, an inventory of accomplishments:

“I have glorified you on earth,”

“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me ...”

“I gave them the words that you gave me, ...”

“I am praying for them ...”

“I watched over them in your name, ...”

“I kept them safe, ....”

“I gave your word to them, ...”

“I say these things so they can share completely in my joy.”

**And**, it also has aspects of a strategic plan.

“Father the time has come. Glorify your son ...”

“I am no longer in the world ...”

“I am coming to you ...”

“I am asking you to keep them safe ...”

“Make them holy in the truth ...”

**This prayer is prophetic** – a private communication that is spoken aloud so that disciples can eavesdrop on both the exit interview and a strategic plan **that reaches into the now**.

“I am not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word.”

“I pray they will be one ...”

In John's gospel, chapters 13-17, are known as the Farewell Discourse. It begins on what we know as Maundy Thursday, with Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. These chapters include an announcement of his betrayal and death and the commandment to love one another as he has loved us. It goes on to the description of God's house having many rooms; and Jesus saying, "My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you. I do not give as the world gives." As a part of his farewell, he said, "I am the vine and you are the branches ..." and then he used many images to convey how our lives are entwined with his. And then Jesus turns to God in prayer.

"I am asking you to keep them safe ..."

"Make them holy in the truth ..."

This is the safe-keeping and truth we are touching on when we say, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "in life and in death we belong to God." At the level of the soul we are always guarded, we are always in God's keeping. It does not mean that we do everything perfectly. It means that through God's grace, our soul's home is with God. This is our hope. **No matter what befalls us, we are safe with God.**

Hope is not only expectation but a deep trust, a trust or trueness that goes beyond daily circumstances, **into God's arc of salvation. Our hope is eternal.** Whereas optimism is hope for a particular outcome – quite often a more personally beneficial outcome.

Faith is also about trust – trust and confidence in someone or something. Quite frankly, there is a lot of faith in the world, faith in football, or Harvard, or intuition, or Amazon Prime, or Subaru, or this party or that politician – faith in any one of these is not a bad thing and it does not have to mean it's over and above God – but very often it is.

As Reformed Christians, we say, glory to God alone; God alone is Lord of the conscience. So what really concerns me about the living of these days, is a groundswell of magical thinking. Magical thinking is a belief in one's own thoughts, wishes, and desires; the belief that by saying something aloud, it will happen or at least influence the outside world. This is what happened in River City, Iowa when Harold Hill came to town. But, what works on Broadway or in Hollywood, does not happen in real life without work, intent, surrender, and perseverance **and truth.** Jesus said, "I am not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word." **This is both the past and the future of the church.** "I pray they will be one ..." he said – have we made this our work and our hope?

The one who prays for us knows this to be a holy truth: **We each have to live our own life. And, we each have to die our own death.** No one should have to die someone else's (death). When policy favors one race and condemns another, when a blind eye protects bullies whose fear and self-serving faith drives violence against the LGBT community or against women, when the most vulnerable are even more vulnerable in a pandemic, it demonstrates the brokenness of our human systems and asks in whom we have put our faith, hope and trust. It is always the work of the church to call out the idolatry of its time.

Two millennia after Jesus prayed this prayer, we are **still** included in this prayer. Theologian, Miroslav Volf wrote, "Note first the two dimensions of the passion of Christ: self-giving love that overcomes human enmity and the creation of space in himself to receive estranged humanity. This same giving of the self and receiving of the other are the two essential moments in the internal life of the Trinity; indeed, with the triune God of perfect love they are identical" (Exclusion and Embrace, 128).

Jesus prayed for unity among believers, among people. As even this deadly virus is being used to divide us, it seems prudent to recognize that the public stories that unified us in the past are broken. And our Christian story has been simplified, softened. Again, from Volf, "If we want the God of the prophets and the God of Jesus Christ, we will have to put up with the 'injustice' of God's grace – and rethink the concept of justice" (208). God's grace **exposes our meager** ability to truly love as Jesus did; we are always growing into the spiritual

maturity for the sake of this love. “Justice is impossible in the order of calculating, equalizing, legalizing, and universalizing actions,” says Volf. “If you want justice and nothing but justice, you will inevitably get injustice. If you want justice without injustice, you must want love” (210).

What he is getting after here is grace is so freely given that no one is excluded unless we or they choose not to partake. That if the love of Christ is for the likes of us, it must be for everyone.

“Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us. Christ PRAYS for us.” Imagine a world in which Jesus Christ prays for you. Imagine a world in which we awaken and find we have been introduced to the person of God, through the person of the Son of God and that we have been filled by the Spirit of God. We then have power to recognize and resist evil and we have the power to live God-ordered lives. And, I don’t mean this to sound dainty or polite. I don’t mean this to sound safe or ordinary. I mean it to sound like we who are the body of Christ in the world, are willing to risk everything for the sake of the fulfillment of Jesus’ exit interview. As Volf wrote, “If you insist that others do not belong to you and you to them, that their perspective should not muddle yours, you will have your justice and they will have theirs; your justices will clash and there will be no justice between you.

If magical thinking is about following our own thoughts, then what we need is to engage with divine imagination. When our officers are ordained in the Presbyterian Church, we promise to serve with “energy, intelligence, imagination and love.” It’s time to give imagination its due; by imagination, I do not mean a story so fantastic it can never “come true” or be real. By imagination, we mean the vision in our mind’s eye that comes from the prophetic wisdom of God. God’s holy mountain, the feeding of the 5000, and this prayer of unity. The world God imagines is a more equal place, a less anxious place and surely a less violent place in which all persons have a sense of grace and belonging.

Through the crucifixion, the church becomes a place rooted in the harshness of reality. Through the resurrection, the church becomes a place that can engage the imagination of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. This prayer is love poured out and a reminder that such love was never meant to be contained or hoarded as the Church has sometimes done. [It is within our power to extend belonging outward through our communities if we can live from our soul’s home.](#)

Let me ask you to do something. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so, and think of something or someone that is a concern for you at present. Let your concern unfold a bit – but now imagine Jesus coming up to you and asking you what’s on your mind. You tell him – and he listens to you. He hears your weariness, your anger, your hurt, your anxiety – and then he takes your hand in his and begins to pray for you. He prays for the place where you and the world meet; he brings his wisdom, his peace, his energy, intelligence, imagination and love to this meeting.

As you open your eyes, remember the presence of Jesus is with you; that the Lord Jesus Christ prays for you. [This prayer](#) reminds us of our connection to the power, love, truth, and responsibility of being a disciple of the Risen Christ; through him we are rooted in every heartache, sorrow, and injustice in this world and through him we are joined to salvation, compassion, healing, joy, [and hope](#). IMAGINE THAT!