

May 24, 2020; Seventh Sunday after Easter
Rev. Maynard L. Toensing, Jr.
St. John Lutheran Church, Crete/Kramer, NE

“The Glory of God is in Giving Gifts” John 17:1-11

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen. Dear Friends in Christ Jesus, Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord, Jesus Christ.

I have loved what Paul says in Romans 8:31–34 (ESV):

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Jesus is interceding for us. Jesus is constantly and continually—even now—praying for us. He is reminding the Father that our sins have been paid for. It was through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension by which we have been brought to reconciliation with the Father. And even now, Jesus continues to keep us in that state of reconciliation and in relationship with His Father who is our Father.

We get a taste of what Jesus prays for in our Gospel text today. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, the night of His trial before His crucifixion on the cross, Jesus prayed. All of chapter 17 is a prayer of Jesus. This is called His “High Priestly Prayer.” He prays for Himself, for His disciples, and for you and me, and for all believers. Now, we don’t get the whole of the prayer in our reading today. As the readings are set in a three year series, one third of the prayer is used as the Gospel text each year for the Seventh Sunday after Easter. Today, our focus is on the first eleven verses. And there is more there than we can cover in this sermon. I do encourage you to read the whole prayer and pray it with Jesus as we have received it here in our Gospel reading.

What we learn from this prayer is a great comfort to us—especially as it follows the celebration of the Ascension last Thursday. This prayer helps us to see that Jesus brings us into a restored relationship with the Father. In baptism and

through faith—we ARE NOW in a relationship with God our Father through Jesus Christ.

THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE GIFT OF RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH THE FATHER THROUGH CHRIST.

When you look at the text, notice that Jesus prays about “glory”, “glorified”, and “glorify.” His glory; the Father’s glory. And what is the glory of God all about? The glory of God is the work of Jesus who brings us to the Father so that we might be in relationship as sons and daughters to Him. Certainly this has already begun. It is what God desires for us now and forever.

Since it comes through the work of Christ, it therefore points us to the cross. Yes, that horrible and awful event 2000 years ago. That bloody scene is where the glorious and eternal Son of God, having taken on human flesh, was beaten, whipped, jeered, mocked and nailed to an implement of torture—a tree of death, in order to save us from sin. Jesus stepped in to take upon Himself the wrath of God against our sin—our disobedience and rebellious ways.

And we have been rebellious—seeking our own glory rather than God’s. The First Commandment tells us that there is no God but God. And we are to worship Him only. However, we have often failed to do that. Way too often we make ourselves the most important person and thing in life. Sure, we do good, kind, and helpful things for others. We have opportunities to serve—and by God’s grace those in need are helped. But how often have we done good acts of kindness because it made us look good? How often have we done some act of kindness because it made us feel good?

But, if we do some kind act because it makes us feel good—well, that is a selfish and self-centered reason for doing something nice. Doing the right thing is not always easy; and it may not make us feel good. Think about the surgeon who must “harm” a patient by cutting into their tissue. Yes, the end result is for good, but it’s a painful way of getting there.

The same is true in spiritual matters. If someone is doing some sin, and we fail to rebuke or point out that sin because we don’t want to “offend” someone—that

failure to rebuke a sinful act, or point out the wrong, is like a surgeon that refuses to cut into a patient. How often have we withheld our tongue to warn against sin because we were afraid of a person instead of fearing God? Our silence against sin does not glorify God.

And our most precious commodity today—time. How often have we really sacrificed our time for someone in need? We will do it easily for someone who is nice and kind to us—or for our family; but what about doing that which is right and good for that person we don't like, but yet needs our time? Setting aside our resources and our time and ourselves for the need of a stranger is really hard. Too often we have judged someone instead of giving them our time—time we can care and listen and understand.

All of these show our sinfulness and the sinful character that needs redeemed. WE ... need redeemed.

We need Jesus. We need Jesus Who did do the work of salvation for us. We need Jesus Who rightly and regularly worshiped and prayed for us. We need Jesus Who sacrificed time and resources—and even His own body in genuine love for the sake of others. Jesus never did anything to make Himself feel good. He did what was good and right because it was right and good and pleasing to His Father and for the good of our salvation. His crucifixion was for the salvation of sinners—but it certainly didn't feel good to Jesus.

Jesus would go the full length and depth of sacrifice for us—He laid down His life for us and died our death for us. He did this so that we might be in the Father's presence instead of separated from Him in hell. That is why we listen to Jesus' words—for they are the truth, as Jesus says.

John 17:8 (ESV): For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

It is faith in Jesus that brings us a closeness with the Father—there is no other way than through Christ and His cross—His suffering and death for sin. What Jesus is talking about here in terms of eternal life is not about some location in the hereafter. Eternal life here is about being close with God—He even makes us one

with Himself; we are loved by Him; we are treasured by our heavenly Father; we are kept in grace; we are sustained in faith; we are comforted in sorrow. All this we have now through Jesus.

It reminds me of what we are doing now during this pandemic. From a distance we are giving air hugs. The hugs, if you will, that we have from God, are through His Word and promises. A time is coming when we will be in—and see—the physical presence of God. That will be in heaven when our flesh is restored to full holiness. Until then, we believe in God's presence by faith; we believe it based on the word and promises of God. This is what Jesus is praying for—our present and eternal closeness with God.

As Jesus prays for God's glory ... so should we. We begin to see that glory through the suffering and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should pray for closeness to God through faith—as Jesus prays this for us, wanting eternal life for us. We pray that we might truly be in Christ and that He would be in us. According to His Word this is something that truly is now, but is hard for us to understand. That's okay. We don't have to understand it—just believe it because it is what Jesus says, and teaches, and prays for. Believe and be comforted by it.

Be at peace—now and always. In whatever situation, rejoice—for God is with you and in you. You are His, set apart to be in His presence forever. This is our comfort and joy. And it is Jesus who has worked this all out for us in Himself. This is God's gift to you—that you are chosen to be close to God and to be present in His home forever. And this gift to you is to God's glory. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all scripture verses quoted are from:

*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version; Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. **ESV® Text Edition® (2016). Usually copied from Logos.** Crossway Bibles is a Division of Good News Publishers, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, USA. All Rights Reserved.*