

First Presbyterian Church
John 17:1-11, “Glory”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 5/28/2017

No one has ever prayed like Jesus.

His moment to moment connection with God was unprecedented.

The most famous and important prayer of Jesus is “the Lord’s Prayer” which he taught his disciples.

But the most extensive prayer of Jesus is found in John 17.

The extensive record of Jesus’ own prayer that we find in John 17 is truly a treasure.

Overview of the prayer:

1-5 – “Jesus Prays for himself” – though we might reconsider that conclusion later on.

6-19 – “Jesus Prays for the first Disciples”

20-26 – “Jesus Prays for us”

As a whole, the prayer is bracketed by the word “glory” and the phrase “before the foundation of the world” (17:5, 17:24).

5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

24“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

The overarching theme of the prayer is that the glory which was in existence before the foundation of the world has now been made manifest—put on display for all to see—in the life of Jesus.

Jesus is praying that this same glory will also be put on display in our lives.

Jean Vanier sets up this prayer beautifully in his reflection on the book of John,

“Having knelt down humbly in front of each disciple to wash their feet, having revealed their journey and the journey of the Church, through pain and joy in to the heart and ecstasy of God, Jesus stops. All has been said.

There is no more place for explanation or discussion. It is now a moment of contemplation. Jesus raises his eyes to heaven. He no longer looks at the earth and at his disciples, but toward the Father.”

As Vanier indicates, with the conclusion of his upper room discourse, Jesus has finished his graduate level seminar on discipleship, and he has finished his preaching and teaching ministry.

Having finished all this, Jesus prays.

In this prayer, he has a conversation with someone he has an extremely close relationship with.

We all know people who are great friends with each other.
I want you to consider a relationship that you admire greatly.
Could be a married couple, could be a deep friendship.

Now imagine: What if you could get inside that relationship?

What if you could hear the way they talked about their hopes and dreams?
Granted, that might be a little bit creepy.

But let’s just say it’s not creepy, okay?

If you could listen in on how these two people make decisions, encourage each other, have arguments, interpret current events... do you think that could change your own approach to relationships?

Take it a step further, what if they invited you into that same kind of friendship with them?
What if you shared in that deep connection they had?

That’s exactly what Jesus does here.

We have a chance to listen in on this dialogue
between God the Son and God the Father.
We might consider this prayer
“a conversation at the center of the universe,”
and it’s a conversation that we are invited into.

Jesus begins his prayer with the word, “Father.”

In the Bible’s telling of Jesus’ life,
Father is the first word we hear on Jesus lips, and the last.

When he was 12 years old he tells his parents,
“Did you not know I needed to be about my Father’s business?”
and at the end his life he says,
“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

We will never really understand the prayer life of Jesus the Son
unless we understand his preoccupation
in prayer with the God the Father.

But for many people, this father focus is a barrier to connecting with Jesus,
rather than an asset.
We are no longer in an overtly patriarchal world,
and in many ways we rightly criticize
the legacy of male domination throughout history.

Bear with me while I explore this a little it:

We must ask: Was Jesus, the second person of the Trinity,
a literal son to the first person of the Trinity who he calls father?
I think we have to say, “No.”

Because if we say “yes, *literally*, they are father and son,”
then Jesus would not be the equal of God the Father,
and would not be eternal, but a created being.

This is how we know that when Jesus says “Father”
he is using a metaphor for his relationship,
not stating a basic characteristic of God.

Now, that metaphor was very important in the first century,
because it opened up a whole world of relationships and implications
that were particular to Fathers and Sons at that time:
All status within a family and therefore in society extended
from the father to the others in the family,
and then to the larger community.
First born sons had privilege in the family,
and were entitled to an inheritance,
while women and daughters were not.
So if Jesus had prayed to “Parent” or “Mother”,
it would not have communicated their relationship
clearly to the first century world because that society
was *strongly, exclusively* patriarchal.

But what about us? “What does the title ‘Father’ mean
to people outside a patriarchal setting?”

We have social leftovers from that ancient world,
but patriarchy is no longer what we aspire to.

So for us, this language which was very appropriate and purposeful
in the first century becomes confusing and cumbersome
in the 21st century.

I do not want to endorse or perpetuate the destructive,
human made relational system of patriarchy.

However, because this language is used so often in the Bible,
it’s almost impossible to avoid it without being disconnected
from the Bible’s message.

So I use the metaphor regularly, but I do so reminding myself
as often as I can that God is not male, that this is a metaphor,
and that all metaphors are limited.

So Jesus prays to the Father -- the Father who sent him,
the Father who blessed him in his baptism,
the Father who wants him to gather up the rest of the family
in order to bring them home.

He prays, “Father, the hour has now come.”
John 2, Cana – to his mother, “my hour has not yet come”
John 7 – to his brothers, frustrated by his secrecy,
“my hour has not yet come,”
But here he says, “the hour has now come.”

Specifically, as we read this prayer, the hour of *glory* has now come.
“Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”

But the next event in John’s gospel is Jesus’ betrayal by Judas,
followed by his trial and crucifixion.
How could this be the hour of glory?

The hour Jesus speaks of is a crisis moment.
It is the time when Jesus will be handed over to violent men,
when he will be crucified.

As Darrell Johnson puts it,
John 17 is now played in the valley of the shadow of death.

How can the darkest hour in Jesus’ life—in the history of the world—
be an hour of glory?

Glory doesn’t always refer to bright shining lights and singing angels.

We can get caught up with visions of fancy gold chairs,
but that’s not what glorifying is about.

To glorify something is to reveal its essential nature and characteristics.

Jesus glorified the Father in his life and ministry.
There’s no God hiding behind the back of Jesus –
when we look at Jesus that’s what God is really like!

When Jesus welcomed little children, he was glorifying the Father –
that is to say, he was showing us what God is like
in that generous welcome.

When Jesus healed the sick, he was glorifying the Father –
that is to say, he was showing us the Father’s desire
that sickness be done away with.

When Jesus shared dinner with prostitutes and drifters,
he was glorifying the Father –
that is to say, he was showing us the heart of the Father
to welcome everyone.

But these things were not at the heart of Jesus' glorification of the Father.
Jesus most glorified the Father in his crucifixion,
because at the very heart of God is the characteristic
of self-giving love.

Jesus knows what is about to come. In fact he's predicted it to his disciples.
He knows what this hour is about.
And he knows that this hour is,
for the Father and the Son, a moment of glory.

So he prays boldly in the face of utter torment
that the Father would be glorified – that is to say,
that he will reveal his essential nature and character
to the world through the death of the Son.

But that's not the only thing Jesus prays for:
Jesus also asks for the Father to glorify the Son.

Why? v. 2: **“For you granted him authority over all people
that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”**

Jesus has authority over all people. Authority to grant eternal life.

So Jesus must also be glorified, his true nature must be put on display,
because it is through Jesus that people will be rescued
from this world of sin and hopeless pain.

And then in verse 3, John the author of the story,
seems to poke his head into Jesus' prayer a bit with this parenthesis.
He explains what Jesus says with line
**“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**

You see, eternal life is not just long life,
but the quality of life that Jesus and the Father have enjoyed forever.

Here we are invited into this beautiful relationship.

We get to be a part of it. We get to know and be known
in the same way that Jesus knows and is known,
and that's what he calls eternal life.

You realize, then, that eternal life starts right now.
We will experience it more fully on another day,
but nevertheless it starts right here on earth.

What does this mean for our own prayer?

How many times have we prayed (implicitly if not explicitly),
“Dear God, I want to glorify you in everything I do,
but it seems like all I do is mess things up.
I'll do everything I can to glorify you more tomorrow.
Amen.”?

That is a very common prayer.
That's a prayer I've prayed it many times.
And it's very bad.

Bad prayer? C'mon, prayers can't be bad! Actually, they can.
If our prayers make much of ourselves and little of God,
they aren't good ways of praying.

And this prayer, “I'll try harder to glorify you more if I can”
does just that because it puts the burden on our own shoulders.

Let me ask you: Do you think we can do more than Jesus?
REPEAT

Did Jesus say, “I'll try hard to glorify you.”
No. Jesus the Son told God the Father,
“Glorify the Son! You glorify me, reveal yourself in me,
because that's your job, and then as a result I can glorify you.”

We can pray the same way. We can put the burden on God, rather than us.

“You do it, God. You glorify me:

By your Spirit reveal the true character of grace
at work in a sinful person like me.

That way, people can see who you are through me.”

That’s good praying. But if we pray like that, we should do so knowing
that it will inevitably lead us embody the self-emptying love
that Jesus demonstrated in his crucifixion.

For that is the glory of God that dwells within us.

If you’re like me, then you haven’t prayed that way very often.

Remember, Jesus is letting us in on his way of praying,
inviting us to share in his special relationship.

If we pay attention, our own praying and our own living will be changed.

Friends, the conversation at the center of the universe has found its way
into our own souls, our own families, our own neighborhoods.

No one has ever prayed like Jesus, but we can try!

So let’s pray together and ask God to a good work within us.

Living God, glorify us. The hour has come.

*It is time to reveal your self-sacrificial character in us,
that we may show the world what you are really like.*

*Lead us away from preoccupation with self,
away from hate-filled labels, sexual objectification,
and clamoring after wealth and security.*

Instead glorify yourself in us. Do the things that we cannot do.

Make us the people we cannot become on our own.

By your grace, let us share in your unique relationship of love.

*We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the one you sent among us,
who lived and died, and reigns with you in glory. Amen.*