

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

EASTER 7

JOHN 17:1-11, ACTS 1: 12-26

THE "OTHER" LORD'S PRAYER

This last Sunday of the Easter season finds the disciples gathered with Jesus as he prepares to leave them. This final part of his long discourse ends with this beautiful, powerful, prayer.

It's interesting to note that Jesus' prayer to the Father before his arrest in the gospel of John is not off alone somewhere with clutched hands praying on a big rock with the disciples taking a nap. In fact, most of the time when Jesus "goes off alone" in scripture to pray, the disciples are usually with him.

Here, it is sitting around a table, after a meal and an extended conversation (which starts in chapter 13 after Jesus washes the disciples' feet) with the disciples hearing every single word that Jesus said.

See, in John's gospel, there is no "teach us how to pray" followed by the Lord's Prayer. This is the Lord's Prayer according to John. As you read through John's gospel, you'll see right away that it's different from the others in its language and tone. John's gospel assumes right from the start that people were created by God to be in relationship with him. That is why the prayer Jesus prays can say that eternal life means knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent. According to John, eternal life comes from a relationship with the eternal God. It begins now, in faith, as we come to know the love of God who made us. And has a future through the promise of the resurrection.

It's not often that we get a definition of eternal life, but here it is right in the scriptures – look at verse 3 of John 17 – "and this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

How many times have you thought of eternal life as this? Knowing God and Jesus Christ? I would bet rarely, if at all.

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus. What if it's just that simple? How would that change what we imagine in this life? How would it affect our thoughts and beliefs in our future life with God? How does this alter even our picture of God? Of course the question we have to ask is a rather obvious one – what does it mean to “know” God?...

I'm not talking about specific knowledge about God here, rather, *knowing* God means being in a relationship with God.

So – what, according to the gospel of John, does a relationship with God look like? According to John's first chapter and all that follows after, Jesus shares in God's very being and existence. What's amazing is that this is precisely what he's inviting us to share as well. Jesus invites us to know and be known by the God whom no one has seen.

Think about the invitation to Nicodemus, to be born again in John chapter 3, or the invitation to the Samaritan woman at the well to drink of living water, in chapter 4, or the hungry crowd and the invitation to work for the food that endures for eternal life.

And that's not even the half of it. In today's lesson, Jesus' summarizes all of who he is as why he came into this world. His incarnation, the cross, resurrection and ascension – these are not separate events in John's gospel, but one complete and inter-related work.

And here's the real kicker – are you ready for this? Jesus goes through all of this so that we may know God (according to verse 3 from today, and so that we may do the Father's work on earth. That's right – Jesus leaves, but we are left here to continue, as his disciples, the work God first entrusted to Jesus.

We are here, my brothers and sisters, to do the work of the father. It's why Jesus prays for the Father to protect us. Because if we truly do his work in this world, we will not be of the world, and we will be recognized as “different”

My brother-in-law travels a great deal for his job. Every year he goes to Japan, China, India, Brazil all over Europe, and Mexico. Americans are received better in some countries, and despised in others. This is what Jesus feared as he prayed “the world

has hated them because they do not belong to the world.” When Joe travels, he is often “despised as the foreigner.

Here’s the question for us today. Can we be similarly identified as Christians in this world? As “foreigners” can we be identified as belonging to God’s world rather than this world? This means then, that if Jesus says we’re not of this world, that the world should recognize us as total foreigners. We think differently. Our values are different. Our approach to life is radically different and sometimes contrary to this world.

Or not.

Perhaps we *don’t* think differently. Really. Our approach to life isn’t really that much different, for all intents and purposes, we are not only *in* the world, we are definitely *of* the world.

Jesus prepared his disciples, not only by praying for them, but by giving them an example of how to be in the world – by loving with the perfect sacrifice of his very self.

Sacrificial love – that is what the world sees and recognizes as genuine and real and true, and yes, other worldly. Because no act we do will impress others as much as sacrifice, and no other act will bring lost people to the cross of Christ, who sacrificed for us.

This is Memorial Day weekend – it’s about remembering. We remember our fallen troops - we remember these men and women, because with trust and love, they made the ultimate sacrifice that you and I may gather here today in freedom and without fear to worship as we please.

On this weekend, we remember how Jesus took bread and cup and gave it to them saying, “my body given for you, my blood shed for you.”

These words signal the defeat of our real enemies – sin and death. They anticipate a day when all swords will be beaten into plowshares and all tears will be wiped away.

In the meantime, we remember Jesus’ example, and his prayer for us, to be love for one another – for it is in simple, concrete acts of sacrifice that the gospel message is made

clear. It is in these simple acts of sacrifice that God's kingdom comes to earth right here in Grove City, where we are called, each of us, to do the work of the father in this place.

May his Holy Spirit fill us and renew us, as we are reminded that we have this advocate to go with us, marked with the cross of Jesus and sealed with the Holy Spirit to do the Father's bidding... in the name of Jesus. Amen.