

John 17:6-19
(Psalm 1; Ephesians 3:14-21)
“And I Am Glorified in Them”

Introduction

We come to the middle passages of this great prayer, Jesus' final words before his arrest, passion and crucifixion. What strikes me is his deep sense of accountability to his heavenly Father for those whom the Father has entrusted to him. Thus he recites his understanding of his ministry to his disciples, and on that basis he asks great things of God for them. I am convicted to ask myself whether I am as aware of those whom the Lord has entrusted to me, whether I can recite with honesty the ministry I have borne to them, and whether it is in confidence of having sought to be faithful in small things that I dare ask the Father of great things for them.

Of course, Jesus self-consecration and his consecration of these first apostles were, in one sense, unique and unrepeatable acts. His prayer rests on assumptions about his own identity and theirs. And yet, he has entrusted his life and ministry to us. We are his continuing presence in the world, the “body of Christ,” commissioned to fulfill his mission to the nations. So all that he did in making disciples and praying for them serves as a model to those of us who are members of his body, the church.

This morning I invite you to join me in turning this central passage of Jesus' final prayer into a means of examining ourselves, our own lives and ministries, and in asking ourselves whether we are aware of the people entrusted to each of us, for every substantial personal relationship of life is a trust given us and required of us. C.S. Lewis put it this way in his sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory”:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. ... It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. ... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked with a mere mortal.

Jesus took people so very seriously, as created in the image of his Father, as potentially destined for glory, as desperately lost but objects of a grace that is greater than our sin. Let his prayer search your heart this morning and show you what God desires of your relationships with those he has entrusted to you, and particularly at those times when, like Jesus, we are taking leave of them.

Body

1. Whom has the Lord entrusted to us?

He speaks of them as belonging to the Father: “yours they were” (17:6,10).

It is all too easy for us to look, not only at a face in the crowd, but at the person sitting across from us, as simply another person who may or may not attract or interest us, someone whom we may chose, or chose not, to know. But the Scriptures remind us throughout that every person we meet is created by God in God’s image and likeness, and therefore carries a dignity and value beyond any nonhuman thing we may handle or touch. We value beautiful things, but too often do not value people, especially those whom we find unattractive.

But Jesus saw, not only these disciples sitting around him at the table, but all whom he encountered as he passed through the towns of Judea and Galilee, as people who belonged by right to his Father, those whom the Father had sent him to seek and save – especially those whom the world did not value. Do we see those around us, and especially those closest to us – family, neighbors, friends – as belonging by right to the one whom we call Father?

He speaks of them as entrusted to him: “and you gave them to me” (17:6,10).

From there, it is a short move to recognizing that, if they are our Father’s and we if we are our Father’s, then they are, in some deep sense, ours and have been entrusted to us by our Father. If they have been entrusted to us, then we will be held accountable for how we treat them. That requires knowing them deeply and truly, and realizing that they have not been given to us to meet our needs, although *they also* are responsible to the Father for accomplishing for us whatever was the purpose of God’s entrusting us to them. We usually get that backwards. We want them to live for us and they want us to live for them, when the Father wants us each to be self-forgetful and to give ourselves away for the sake of the other.

That may mean that we hang in with them long after we long to run away. It also sometimes means that we thrust them out for their own good and for the good of others whom the Lord has entrusted to us. In other words, this does not mean that we are to remain in enabling toxic relationships that need, for the good of all, to be ended.

My point is simply this: Do we recognize, as C.S. Lewis said, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked with a mere mortal”? Those with

whom we live and work and play belong by right to God and have been entrusted to us for us to help them on their journey to the City of God.

2. How have we kept and guarded them?

He gave them God's word: "I have given them your word" (17:8,14).

Jesus opened God's Word to his disciples, showing them how the Scriptures are to be read, always around the central narrative of God on mission, seeking and saving his lost people and his lost world. The story finds its interpretive key in Jesus himself, his life, death and triumph over death – the triumph of self-sacrificial love over the principalities and powers of this world.

We should never forget that one of the greatest gifts that we can give to those with us on the journey is an appreciation and understanding of God's Word, that is the chief means used by the Holy Spirit in setting captives free and bringing to life those who are spiritually dead. But it must be read as the good news it is of God's redeeming love.

He gave them a godly example: "For their sake I consecrate myself" (17:19).

Here is where we must feel the weight of our own brokenness and failure. Only Jesus perfectly embodied the message he proclaimed. Only he was a perfect example of the self-sacrificial love of God for rebels and sinners like you and me. He went to the cross because we could not offer a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Only he could do so. And in him alone we find cleansing from sin, forgiveness full and free.

But he has also given us his Spirit and the means of grace, beginning with the Word of God, so that we may grow up into ever-greater obedience to the truth. We will never be perfect examples, but we should be consistent examples of the self-sacrificial love with which we have been loved. We should seek, as I say so often, to live in such a way that people will have reason to believe that the gospel is true.

3. How should we pray for them, especially as we take our leave of them?

He asks the Father to keep them in his name: "keep them in your name" (17:11,15).

Don't miss the depth of this part of the prayer. What does Jesus mean when he speaks of keeping them in the Father's name? When the Lord called Moses to set his people free, Moses asked God his name – not his generic name, Elohim, but his personal name, the name known, as it were, only to his

family. God said, my name is, I AM, YHWH, I AM WHO I AM. Israel considered this name so sacred that it would not pronounce it, but whenever the Scriptures were read and the reader came to the four letters of God's covenant name, instead of YHWH, the reader would say, Adonai, LORD.

But when Jesus was asked who he was, and when he referred to himself, he would say, I AM. Eight times in John's gospel, Jesus uses the I AM formula to describe himself, as in, for example, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). In Jesus, the meaning of God's covenant name took human flesh. Thus, Paul writes, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10f).

So, to keep them in the Father's name means that he perfectly revealed to them who the Father truly is, and he delivered them from sin and death in the name and power of the Father. That name has been placed upon us, the children of God, and we are to pray in Jesus' name for those whom the Father has entrusted to us.

He asks the Father to sanctify them in the truth: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (17:17).

Finally, we should pray that the Lord will use all things that come to sanctify us and those entrusted to us. The aim of sanctification is to make us more and more like Jesus, the only perfect human – in other words, to make us in Christ more fully human, more clearly like our Father who made us for intimate communion with him. This we pray and this we pursue day after day.

Conclusion

Jesus' life and ministry were directed toward his Father's glory and the good of those his Father had entrusted to him. His dreams, desires, prayers and labors – finally his death and resurrection – all were directed toward these great ends. Do we have that same overwhelming sense of the eternal seriousness of what has been entrusted to us? Whom has the Father given you, and how are you living and praying for them?