

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
7th Sunday after Easter
Sunday, May 17, 2026
Scripture: John 17: 1-11
Sermon: Jesus Prays

On this last Sunday of the Easter season, we look both backwards and forwards. We have heard about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. Today we remember Jesus Ascension as he ascends to the Father to be with him in Heaven. Acts 1: 9-11 "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'" Jesus had to go back to the Father so his Holy Spirit could come and be with us.

We have talked about the coming Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the comforter, the encourager that we will celebrate next Sunday with the birth of the new church, going forth in mission with the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

This time for the disciples is a mix of fear and possibility. As they head off into the unknown and life without Jesus by their side, their leader who has challenged and nurtured them. There is a great deal to be afraid of but also a lot to be excited about.

Today we pause for a moment to hear the prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples, the prayer we claim as his prayer for us.

Jesus' final words are a prayer for himself and a prayer for us, and for his disciples he is leaving. This is a prayer that the disciples actually overhear, rather than falling asleep in the garden or running away. This prayer tells us so much about who God is in Jesus Christ. Jesus prays for

God's presence in the world for us, he prays for us to know each other and know God as he knows us and knows God. This is his definition of eternal life and it's a different definition of eternal life than what we are used

to. Eternal life is not postponed, it's here and now. It's defined by relationship with God and with each other.

The most striking thing to me in this passage is that Jesus centers on knowing God as what is essential for eternal life. Not salvation and redemption through the forgiveness of sins as we have traditionally come to understand it. It's a sign that Jesus Christ's work of atonement stretches beyond the cross and involves all of his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Knowing the Father and Son roots us in relationship and helps us think of eternity more clearly as a relational reality.

It reminds us of why we exist in the first place: to be in relationship with the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Of course, we know that the forgiveness of sins and the new covenant established by Jesus's work on the cross is part of what God does and how we come to know God, but Jesus's prayer makes as equally clear that God was motivated to do so that we might know God. If we identify as the ultimate prize being saved from our sins so that we can live in paradise, then we do not yet know the love that motivated God to give us such a gift.

Jesus's prayer also makes clear that this is a relationship and reality that is begun to be experienced here on earth. We continue to know God right here, right now, through all things Christ. Jesus says that he has made known the Father, done all that the Father has asked him to do, and as a result, his beloved have kept the Father's word.

Jesus is speaking this out loud to a group who don't understand what is about to change in their lives. They know the hardships that have been involved in following Jesus. They know the things that Jesus has said that they have tried to downplay or avoid and now Jesus is reinforcing that they not only belong to him, but they belong to the Father.

The disciples, and all who come after them, will have to belong to Jesus, until he comes again. There is not the same physical presence that Jesus had while he was on earth, but they are not alone. Along with the other recent promise we've heard in this Easter season that the disciples will not be left orphans because Jesus and the Father are giving the Holy Spirit to them, Jesus prays that the Father's protection will remain—that the Father will literally “keep watch” over their beloved until one day they too are joined into the unity that the Trinity have with one another. Because then, in the experience of eternal life, each of those whom God has

guarded and kept will know the glorious “only true God, and Jesus Christ” who loved them there.

In John 17 one of the most profound and intimate moments in Jesus’ ministry on earth happened. In this chapter Jesus prayed to God just before His crucifixion. This prayer, often called the “High Priestly Prayer,” gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus and provides powerful lessons for our own prayer lives.

We see Jesus’ deep connection with God. In John 17:1-5, He acknowledges that His hour has come, demonstrating His awareness of God’s timing and plan. This teaches us the importance of aligning our prayers with God’s will and recognizing His sovereignty in our lives.

Remember Jesus’ prayer is broken down in three main parts. First, Jesus prays for Himself, but not in a selfish manner. He asks to be glorified so that He can, in turn, glorify the Father. This reminds us that even in our personal requests, our ultimate aim should be God’s glory, not our own.

While He starts off praying for Himself, the bulk of Jesus’ prayer focuses on others. He prays for His disciples and all future believers. He prays for their protection, unity, and sanctification. This exemplifies the selfless nature of intercessory prayer and encourages us to pray fervently for others, especially fellow believers.

Jesus’ prayer for unity among believers is particularly meaningful to us. He asks that they may be one, just as He and the Father are one. This underscores the importance of Christian unity and challenges us to pray for and actively pursue harmony within the body of Christ.

Also remember throughout the prayer, Jesus emphasizes the importance of knowing God. He defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. This teaches us that the essence of our faith is not just about rules or rituals, but about a deep, personal relationship with God.

Also, Jesus’ prayer reveals His great love for His followers. He speaks of His desire for us to be with Him and to see His glory. This assures us of Jesus’ ongoing love and intercession for us, even now as He sits at the right hand of the Father Jesus is praying for us and our needs.

As we reflect on Jesus’ prayer in John 17, may we be inspired to deepen our own prayer lives, focusing on God’s glory, while also praying for

others, pursuing unity, and growing in our knowledge and love of our Lord and Savior.

Jesus wants us to abide in him and he in us. Jesus wants us to pray to him. Jesus wants us to obey everything he says. Jesus wants us to trust him. Jesus wants us to be on the same mission he has been on.

If I think that eternal life is just some time in the future and in another place, I lose connection with the Person of God. I would then be tempted to live life here on earth as if God was only “UP THERE” with little connection to “HERE AND NOW.”

Our salvation is centered...not on a place called heaven...but on a Person. Knowing God and his Son, Jesus.

Jesus’ goal was that people would believe in him, that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him. This is his work, and it glorified the Father.

If you are a believer in Jesus, you are his! All of us at times wonder if the Lord cares. If he loves us. If you have believed in his Son, you are his. You are his sons and daughters. This is a beautiful and intimate calling.

Verse 15 says, “ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”

He prays for their spiritual protection. As Satan tried to destroy the Son of God, so he will try to destroy the Son’s followers. So he prays the Father would protect them from Satan’s work.

Verses 16- 19 says, “ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Jesus knows that they now ultimately belong to him in heaven. Their true home is not here any longer. To be sanctified means to be consecrated. Made holy. Set apart for sacred use. So Jesus is praying that we, his followers, would be set apart for holy purposes. And in vs. 18, as Jesus was sent to earth, so he is sending his disciples on a holy mission. They will be sanctified by the truth, the word of God as they believe and obey it... as they “keep” it (vs. 6), for what God says is meant to be acted on, not merely heard and dismissed and ignored.

So though the disciples are in the world, we are to live in the world but not be of the world. This is not our home.

Now Jesus prays not merely for his 11 disciples who are with him. He prays for all those who follow. That means he is praying for us. For you. Knowing this ought to catch our attention. Jesus prays for me and for you.

If we, the people of God, will live in harmony together like a well-tuned and skilled orchestra, the people around us will see a glimpse of God. They will get a glimpse of the love of God.

John 13:35 ESV “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

To have the oneness Jesus is praying for requires having God’s heart. It takes love for one another. It takes an unselfishness. It takes submission. It takes humility.

When we live this way, God in heaven is on display through us. To seek after such unity and oneness and love is part of our mission: to declare God the Father and his Son, Jesus, to the world.

So we should pray like Jesus prays. Often.

Jesus wants us to be with him. Yes, it is in heaven. But it’s only heaven because Jesus is there. More than longing for a place we are to long for a person.

That is why the Apostle Paul prays at the end of 1 Corinthians, “Marantha,” which means, “Come, Lord.” Come back to earth, Jesus, to take us home with you forever and ever.

We read this important and amazing passage this morning. Now what do we do with it? How should it shape our thinking about God and life and eternity? Let me offer that we pray.

Jesus’ prayer here tells us what is important to God. We can continue to pray for our daily needs and trials. That is good. God cares about all those things. But what Jesus prays is instructive to us. And inspiring. Let us pray for the very important things Jesus prays for.

Know God’s greatness. Your Savior, Jesus Christ, is glorious and great. He is eternal. He is the Creator. He was sent from heaven. He came to save the world. He has been given all authority over all humankind to give resurrected life to all who believe.

Let us glorify God and lift God up in praise with our mouth, our heart, and your very life. Honor him. Sing to him. Obey him. Worship him and know that we belong to God and we are his.

Pray for each other, that God would protect us from evil and discouragement. Pray that he would protect us by the power of his Holy Spirit and by the work of the church, the Body of Jesus Christ, whose purpose is to strengthen one another.

Pray that we would have Jesus' joy. Fullness of joy.

Pray that we would be sanctified by the truth. Set apart for God's purpose. Made holy for the mission God has for us. As the Father sent the Son into the world to rescue it, so the Son sends us. Pray that we would all know God's holy calling on our lives.