

10-20-19 SERMON CCI John 17: 6-19 Jesus' Prayer List, Part 2

Last Sunday we began our look at Jesus' Prayer List found in his prayer in John 17. We discovered 2 requests on Jesus' Prayer List: 1) that for the remainder of his life on earth, he would glorify God; and 2) that his followers would grow in knowing the one true God and his Son, Jesus Christ. And we asked what would it be like if we placed those two prayer requests at the top of our own prayer lists? What if every day we prayed that for the remainder of our lives, long or short, we would glorify God, and that we would grow more and more in knowing God and Jesus Christ. This morning, we are exploring the second portion of Jesus' Prayer List.

But let me begin with a story. "There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and says, "What the (heck) is water?"¹ It's so easy to live our lives without seeing the most important realities. Like fish blind to the water they are swimming in.

In this prayer Jesus was praying about some of those hard-to-see realities. And he prayed outloud with his disciples present so that they would hear his prayer, and so we would hear his prayer, and have our eyes opened. So with eyes wide open, let's explore what Jesus prayed for us.

In verse 6, we hear Jesus talking to the Father about his disciples sitting around him. And what did Jesus say about them? That God gave them, and us, to Jesus- which makes us gifts. Think about that: you and I are gifts from the Father to Jesus. Let that sink in: Jesus considers you and me as gifts to himself from the Father. Women laugh when a man acts like he is "God's gift to women," but Jesus says that each of us are God's gifts to him, gifts with a purpose.

In verse 7- 8, Jesus described why we are gifts to him: 1) We see what the world does not see - that everything Jesus did, all his powers, his wisdom, his teachings, and his ability to cut through to the real point, did not just make Jesus a remarkable spiritual teacher. We see that Jesus is divine and sent from God. His was no accidental birth and life, his was no Horatio Alger story, no hometown boy makes good celebration; Jesus was sent to earth from God with a purpose: to show us what God is like and to give his life for the sins of the world.

In verses 11- 12 Jesus prays for his disciples as he prepares to leave this world and return to the Father. While Jesus was here, he was the glue that held the disciples together, stopped their arguments about who should be first, who deserved to sit at the right hand of Jesus in the kingdom, who deserved Jesus' attention and who didn't (remember the disciples' reaction to people bringing their children to Jesus?). Jesus protected his disciples from attacks by the religious leaders. Who would protect them when Jesus was gone? Jesus prayed that God would now protect them and us by the power of God's name. Now before we breathe a sigh of relief, "Yes! Jesus prayed for our protection, that we would be kept safe from harm and danger and fear," look at verse 11 again. He prayed for protection for us... but not from physical danger. He prayed for protection from a bigger danger - that when difficult times

¹ David Foster Wallace, in commencement speech, <https://www.1843magazine.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words>

come, we would lose our oneness, we would turn on one another, turn away from one another, rather than stand together in the power of Jesus' name. I am reminded of the Morningstar Baptist Church we prayed for earlier. As a black church, they've been attacked by white supremacists. It wasn't the first time. Jesus prayed for them in John 17. Jesus prayed that in his absence, they would be one just like he and the Father are one. He prayed that for us too. He prayed for protection from anything and anyone who would tear us apart, break up our unity. In Jesus' mind, there are things more important than health and safety, even safety from white supremacists. Standing together as one is one of them.

Being one does not mean that we all think the same way, that we're all alike, and that we never disagree. Paul used the image of the church as the body of Christ in I Corinthians. In a human body, all the parts are not the same, they don't all do the same work but they all work together. Some parts of the body, like hormones, even slow down or speed up other body parts. But all the parts of the body have the same purpose- to work together to keep the body healthy. When a part of the human body grows out of control, taking over the space of other organs, we call it cancer. It's the same in the church. We each are a part of the body, some are feet, some eyes, some hearts and livers, some are even nose hairs. Imagine being a nose hair for Christ! Being one means that even as we are all different, we are united in our purpose, we work together, we listen to one another even when we disagree, because like hormones in a human body correct an imbalance, we need the different voices to keep balanced. Sometimes in the church, people try to take over, push their weight around, begin to hurt others in their desire to control- like a cancer. Being one means we agree to live and speak and act according to our shared values in Christ, not just our own preferences. Jesus prayed for protection from anything or anyone who would tear us apart and damage our unity.

Jesus was praying that his disciples would be his very presence, his body, in this world. Not that we would withdraw from the world, but that we would go and be the hands and feet of Christ **in the world**. And that makes this world – here in this place, and every place we go – sacred ground, because where we go, Jesus is present. In fact, in verse 18, he prays, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." We've been sent, friends, not just to sit in these chairs and worship, share fellowship with one another, and study the Bible, as good as all those things are. We have been sent into the world with the message of God's love through Jesus Christ. Sent as ambassadors of Christ out there. Sent as those who represent the kingdom of God to the world. Jesus is counting on us to be his presence in the world. And everywhere we go in the name of Jesus becomes sacred space and an opportunity to share God's love.

People are willing to look all over the world to experience the sacred. Barbara Brown Taylor writes that "They will spend hours launching prayers into the heavens. They will travel halfway around the world to visit a monastery in India or to take part in a mission trip to a foreign land. The last place most people look is right under their feet in everyday activities and

encounters of their lives. What possible spiritual significance could a trip to the grocery store have?" Barbara Brown Taylor asks.²

A lot, if we are willing to see it.

Jesus says, "*I am no longer in the world, but (you) are.*" So even ordinary events like a trip to the grocery store can be sacred if our eyes and hearts are open to being Jesus' presence there.

And here's the thing: you already are. You already are the presence of Jesus in the world. When you stop in and visit someone who can't get out much and bring joy and the light of Christ to them, Jesus is present and that bedroom or livingroom becomes sacred space. When you visit Tent City 4 and drop off some supplies, Jesus is present and that outdoor space becomes sacred. When you help a neighbor, stand up for someone who is being treated badly, send a card of unity to a church who is being attacked, listen to someone who needs a friend to care, when you stop and speak with love and kindness even though you're frustrated, Jesus is present. Even in a grocery store. When you look around and really see the people, you may notice someone is stressed and say a kind word, help them reach an item, or let them go ahead in line, Jesus is present, and that store becomes sacred space. That's the water we are swimming in. The water of sacred opportunities to be the presence of Jesus in the world around us.

That's why Jesus has sent us into the world- to open the eyes of the blind (sometimes even our own eyes), to declare release to captives, and to set prisoners free. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus has sent us into the world. He has sent us outside these walls because that's where most of life takes place. That's where the people we are called to love are. Outside these walls, where any place can be sacred space in Jesus' love. We've been sent; will we be Jesus' sent ones or Jesus' sitting ones?

So, we have two more prayer requests to add to our own prayer lists:

- 1) That we would be one, that God would protect us from any attitude, person or thing that wants to divert us from being one, even as God and Jesus are one.
- 2) That we will accept our assignment of being sent to be Christ's visible presence in the world, to be his hands and feet in the world. Lord, open our eyes to the opportunities all around us, open our lips to share your love, open our hearts to those who are hungry for more life than they know now.
- 3) What if our church's prayer list had at the top: Lord, send us into the world to make and grow disciples, give us the courage we need to go, give us the words to say, and the passion to care and not give up, and give us the willingness to change so that others can find you as Lord. Lord, we want being your sent ones to become the purpose that drives all that we do together, and even what we dream to do. Change our hearts, O God, so that we want what you want.

² Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, pg. 12.