

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: John 17:1, 9-11, 15-21 (The Living Bible)

17 When Jesus had finished saying all these things he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Reveal the glory of your Son so that he can give the glory back to you....⁹ “My plea [now] is not for the world but for those you have given me because they belong to you. ¹⁰ And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me with everything else of yours, and so *they are my glory!* ¹¹ Now I am leaving the world, and leaving them behind, and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your own care—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are, with none missing...¹⁵ I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from Satan’s power. ¹⁶ They are not part of this world any more than I am. ¹⁷ Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world, ¹⁹ and I consecrate myself to meet their need for growth in truth and holiness.²⁰ “I am not praying for these alone but also for the future believers who will come to me because of the testimony of these. ²¹ My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind, just as you and I are, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.

This is the word of the Lord.. THANKS BE TO GOD

READING OF THE PSALM: PS 139: 1-10 pg 577 OT O LORD, you have searched me and known me. ²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. ³You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. ⁵You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. ⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.⁹If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

This is the word of the Lord.. **THANKS BE TO GOD**

“It’s Us He’s Talking About”

“It’s us he’s talking about, Naomi. He’s talking about US!” This is what Pat Compher said so excitedly to me when she was explaining why it was that she’d chosen this particular passage. I’d asked her, you see, to pick her favorite scripture, and I’d told her that today, on her special day, I’d endeavor to preach on it. For a Bible scholar like Pat, I figured it might be challenging for her to pick just one, but she pretty quickly offered up John 17, Jesus’ Farewell Discourse. Jesus’ Farewell Discourse...they’re some of Jesus’ most important words, almost like a last will and testament, offered at the time of his Last Supper with his disciples. Specifically, Pat wanted the portion of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse called his High Priestly Prayer, a beautiful, packed-with-emotion prayer, no doubt meant to be overheard by Jesus’ disciples. And then within the Prayer, Pat focused on one particular verse, vs 20, the verse wherein Jesus said, *“I am not praying for these alone but also for the future believers who will come to me because of the testimony of these.”* She said, *“It’s us he’s talking about, Naomi.”* *“He’s talking about US.”*

Yes, Pat, he was talking about us, and it is quite something, when you think of it, that Jesus, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD, on his final night on earth, the night before he was to be crucified, had the inclination in his heart to pray for believers in the future, for us, for you, for me. It’s really amazing. All of Time was laid out before him, and he could be, as the psalmist said, “mindful of us” who were not yet even known to this world. And he wasn’t just praying in general for those who might believe in the future, for some massive nameless blob of future believers who will come to trust in his name through the witness and testimony of the gospel. No, Jesus was actually praying for each of us, in particular, ones who would someday awake to the presence of his Spirit in them. Jesus was praying for us... personally.¹

Maybe this shouldn’t surprise us so much, for this is his character. He told us in the Gospel of John that his sheep know his voice and that he calls them by name, right? (Jn 10:27-28) And as the psalmist wrote, he seeks us out and is acquainted with all our particular ways. Here, he even

¹ Zach Pummell. “Jesus Prays for Unbelievers” <https://www.rockwallpres.org/sermon-jesus-prayed-for-unbelievers> (accessed 6-17-22).

calls us his glory. Yes, on his final night on earth, when *“Jesus had all the reason in the world to be focused on himself”*,² he instead looked outward, giving, emptying himself for his disciples, for those there with him and those to come.

(Pause) Now, this passage offers something even more, as if that wasn't enough, when we look also at the content of his High Priestly Prayer, when we read what Jesus actually asked of God. Quite simply, he prayed for us to do the exact same thing. He prayed that, as his disciples, we would be led to focus outward as well, like him, channeling our concern for each other. He prayed that we'd do this IN the world, broken and messy as it is, the world God loves. *“I am not asking you to take them out of the world. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* Jesus wanted us to engage the world, to extend ourselves beyond our boundaries and walls, refusing to let differences divide us, to care for the weak and suffering, offer hospitality to the neighbor beyond our knowing, everywhere and anywhere, in their infinite variety, to work for justice and peace, and to show mercy and grace, and to love as he has loved us.

Today, on this, the American holiday called Juneteenth, it is especially appropriate that we remember that in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, in the South, many Americans, including, of course, American Christians, averted their eyes from the ugliness of slavery, segregation and racism. It's not our business,” they said. “Our business, the business of the church, is the spiritual realm, the health of our souls, not what is happening IN the world.” This is still the way some 21st century Christian Americans behave. However, others, Christians of moral courage and conscience have taken a stand, declaring themselves followers of Jesus and condemning slavery, prejudice, bigotry and racism.³ They've done, they do, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, “live completely IN the world for only then can anyone really learn to believe.”⁴

So, we not only have a passage here which reminds us how much our Savior values us, how great our God's love is for us, as to pray for us, personally, centuries before we were even born,

² Zach Pummell. *“Jesus prayed for Unbelievers”*. <https://www.rockwallpres.org/sermon-jesus-prayed-for-unbelievers> (accessed 6-16-2022).

³ John Buchanan. *“Into the World”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2009/052409.html> (accessed 6-16-2022).

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *“Letter and Papers from Prison”*. (New York: SCM Press, Ltd.; 1997), 368-9.

but we have one of those holy scriptures where we are given a glimpse of the awesomeness of God's power! This is a "proof is in the pudding" text! You see, (slowly) all that we do in Jesus' name: the collecting of food, diapers, toys, pet supplies, the filling of backpacks for those in need, the making of baby blankets and hygiene kits for people in crisis, the delivery of donuts for the elderly and making of casseroles for those in difficult times, the teaching of Sunday school, rocking of babies, the transporting to and fro and making of dishes for the church family, the preparation of sandwiches for the homeless, the "just checking on ya" calls and the writing of "thinking of you" cards...yes, even the tender planting of flowers to make more welcoming God's house...all of this is testimony, my friends, to Jesus' prayer being powerfully answered! It is the proof that the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is working through us, accomplishing his purposes for the world. When we give of ourselves as Christ gave of himself in the world, we are proving Christ's prayer, offered so long ago, to be fulfilled. Let that sink in a little bit. When we give of ourselves as Christ gave of himself IN the world, we are proving Christ's prayer to be fulfilled! In fact, we are all of us here this morning because his earnest prayer was answered when someone else invited us to come! Wow!

And what's more...what Jesus promised would happen along the way for us, for all his disciples, past, present and future, who do his work in the world happens. And that is... JOY. Joy, real, pure joy happens when we spend time with someone who needs a friend, when we come alongside a brother or sister who needs encouragement or a shoulder to cry on, when we offer a smile to uplift the stranger, forgive the one who has wronged us, or when we embrace the one who needs to know they're welcomed. As Francis of Assisi once prayed, "*Lord, make us servants in this world, this world, this time and this place where you call us to be, to love and serve and where you promise us JOY.*"⁵

(*pause*) Brothers and sisters, Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17, reminds us of what brings us all here each week, of what brought Pat here for 52 years of weeks and John for many

⁵Quoted in John Buchanan. "*Into the World*" <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2009/052409.html> (accessed 6-16-2022).

of those too....that is, to experience the joy which comes not just individually but corporately as we work TOGETHER for God and God's kingdom, as we fulfill Christ's prayer for us. It is what binds us together, a body of believers who know themselves loved, each and everyone, and it identifies us as First Presbyterian Church-Copperas Cove. And I'm quite sure that it's what is causing us to grow. This is what Jesus wanted and what he planned. It is what gives us laughter, hope and a sense of peace in an otherwise pretty tough world. It's what lets us live so preciously, so vulnerably and with that sense of passion that is sometimes so great that we feel we can't get enough of it. Jesus said, *"My prayer for all of them is that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."* Yes, Pat, it's us he's talking about. He's talking about us. May the glory always be HIS. Amen and Amen.