

Marion SEPTEMBER 4, 2022 weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



SERMON Aug 28, 'Prayers: In the Garden' John 17:1-26

This week we look at another prayer prayed by Jesus. It's a different prayer around the last supper and the garden. We've looked at the "not my will but thine" prayer previously. Here it seems He's accepted His destiny and is focusing on what is coming after His sacrifice and resurrection.

This prayer is a wonderful illustration of intentional, ordered, structured prayer. This is a specific yet broad prayer. It is specific in that it is all about a sense of unity and the spread of the gospel message. It is broad in that it widens out. Often this is seen as three prayers in one. It's really one prayer expanding outward. Jesus begins with Himself, then to His immediate disciples, then to every future disciple. All of it is linked, however in unity, the gospel furthering, and ultimately a journey home.

We are reminded that prayer, while conversational, can be intentional and even almost planned. There is prayer where we simply talk with God and then listen and look for how God will respond in our lives. There is urgent prayer in the midst of an immediate and unforeseen need. Someone gets hurt. We pass an accident on the highway. Whatever it may be it's a situation unexpected and thrust upon us. We respond in conversation with God. Then sometimes, our prayers are specific and intentional.

Many of you have heard me use the phrase "singularity of purpose" when it comes to prayer. Why am I praying? Prayer isn't preaching. Prayer isn't a subtle way to call people out on perceived slights. Prayer is conversation with God, and sometimes that conversation needs to be dialed in. We focus because something is heavy on our heart, and perhaps as here we realize as we pray the ever widening circles of people that what we are praying for affects.

Crafting a prayer before God for some may seem inauthentic. In some cases that may be true. In others however, the crafting is a sobering exercise for the one praying and helps to come before God intent, fervent, and both vulnerable to whatever is being prayed about and ultimately also open to whatever God's response might be.

Let's look at the prayer itself.

I love Jesus' initial line. "Glorify me that I may glorify You." When we pray, purpose is everything. Why are we asking for something? Is it for our own notoriety or glory? Or is it so that we can better serve God and live out our calling in a way that glorifies Him? This doesn't mean we aren't asking for things to improve our lot or better ourselves. It simply means that beyond the "goodies" of whatever that looks like, there is a much deeper and greater reason for the request. We believe a positive answer will help us to be better disciples. A simple example to help understand a farther reaching sense of this is praying for others. How does praying for others in the long run elevate our own relationship with God? It develops compassion in us. It is an expression of love and grace. Wanting to see the best for those we love is all about putting others before ourselves and celebrating their victories and successes, hoping they will also impact the world for Christ.

Then there is the foundation of what is coming next as He is about to pray for His disciples who will take up the mantle of spreading the gospel. He reports that His work is done. He has pulled in His followers, and He is about to go to the ordeal that will bring salvation to those who believe. Why would He report this? Doesn't God already know? Of course God does. But think about when talking to family or even a supervisor about moving to a new venture. It's natural in conversation to share that you believe that you've done what you came into the circumstance to do. Now it's time to move on. This is conversant prayer.

He finishes the part focused on Himself with a beautiful request. "Bring me home." Jesus had forsaken paradise for the sake of creation. Now he gets to go home. This is a bookend to this prayer and it's wonderful.

The prayer moves then outward to His disciples. While they have largely been buffoons through His ministry, still He has incredible faith in them and their potential. Jesus sees their heart above all. They have committed to Him fully and He knows that they will not only grasp but also pass on His message.

In unity Jesus draws them in to a sense that they are part of Him. If they are part of Him, they are part of God because if God and Jesus are one, to be one with Jesus is to be one with God. This is very much an intercession as He passes the torch. The message lives on even if Jesus is leaving His post. For those of us who will relinquish positions of leadership this is a grand role model. Pray for God to bless and lead those who follow us. Do what Jesus did and take time to pass on what we can to our successors. Know that if we don't leave a legacy of informed, prepared people to keep things moving that what we started will die quickly. Jesus has done the work, and now He asks God to watch over those who will continue that work.

I love that Jesus prays that God will not "take them out of the world". Too often Christianity today wants to be sterilely separate from the grit of the world. Jesus isn't asking for the disciples to get out of the mess. He's asking God to protect them while they are in it. He recognizes that they can't offer redemption to those who need it without being in company of those who need it. When He is asking God to protect them He is asking to keep them from falling into the temptations that will invariably present themselves as they minister.

This is what Jesus is talking about when He asks for them to be protected by God's "name". It can't be the name of Jesus. He asks for them to be protected by God's name and the name God gave Jesus. These aren't the same names. This term translated to "name" is really understood as "identity" or "character". How does God protect them? By inspiring and leading them into the character and identity of God. What character and identity did Jesus live into and fully represent? That of God. This isn't running around declaring "in the name of Jesus." This is so much deeper and more honest. It is striving to live into the very character of God revealed in Christ and passed down to us.

There is a very sobering point in all of this. Protection doesn't, and can't mean physical. The disciples except for one died martyrs' deaths. So it can't be that God is magically protecting us from harm. The protection is "from the evil one". This is protection from giving in to those things that would compromise our faith. With Jesus it's SO much and so frequently about the spiritual and deep, not the superficial.

This prayer expands out to unity with God, Christ, and disciples, and then goes to the spread of the gospel as Jesus sends them into the world asking God to watch over His greatest friends as they embark on the grand adventure of ministry and world shaking evangelism.

Finally Jesus expands outward one more layer. He goes from present to distant future. He incorporates every disciple that will every be into this prayer. And again it is about unity. One with God and one with each other. Think about math. If $A=B$ and $B=C$ the $A=C$. If we are one with Christ we are one with God and if others are one with Christ and one with God then we are one with them.

Not to be repetitive from last week's message, but do we fully grasp this in our country and area? Do we grasp that to be one with God means we are to be one with one another? Of course we could argue that the "one with" applies to believers, but there's always a little more to it. We are called to invite others into that same faithful relationship with Jesus. To be one with us.

This is why we have a mandate towards compassion, kindness, and grace. If we are called to invite all, we are hoping to be one with all. If this isn't our heart's desire, we return to the image of Christ. "Go into ALL the world". "Don't take them out of the world but protect them from the evil one."

Through the power of God, revealed in Christ, and sustained in us through the Holy Spirit we are called and have the power to change the world!

Jesus bookends His prayer beautifully. Remember at the start where He asks for God to bring Him home? He ends asking God to bring all the future believers to that same home. His prayer isn't self centered. It is other centered to the end of time wanting everyone to be offered the message so they can come to faith and for all those who do to see Him in His glory and bask in that glory themselves.

Jesus is the Son of God, and He's all about us.... If He's all about us, and we are one with Him, we must be all about each other.

The bookends of this prayer are noteworthy. He asks that both He and we be welcomed home into God's heavenly kingdom and glory. The catch is that in that kingdom all that barriers that divide us are torn down. What if we did the work to tear them down here and now? The kingdom of this world may start to look a lot more like the Kingdom of God, and many more may be inspired to come be a part of it.