

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A, May 24, 2020 UPMP

MUSICAL CALL TO WORSHIP

WELCOME:

Grace and Peace to you from United Protestant Church in Morgan Park, Duluth, Minnesota where last evening, when we tried to barbeque for Memorial Day, we were wearing hats and jackets, but this morning we could break out the sandals. Spring here. How's that song go? "But to tell you the truth? I like it in Duluth."

Here in Morgan Park the hummingbirds have returned, and anywhere you walk you can hear the deep whistling call of Orioles. And those crazy tame foxes are out and about near the church.

And so with all of this, we gather, near and far, video or written word, or the few souls spaced around this building...--we gather for prayer, and praise, and gratitude... we gather, here and now, for love.

So as we begin, let's take a moment to still our minds and open our hearts and bring that spirit into our souls, wherever we're at.

MUSIC

SCRIPTURE:

We are in the closing pages of Jesus's "Farewell Discourse" in the book of John. Again, let me recommend that this is a cool section of Gospel to read as a whole. Take some time to read through the "teens" in John... you'll get used to the repetitive language. And when you do, there's some incredible stuff there.

John 17:1-11

17After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of

the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

MUSICAL

SERMON: “Jesus Prayed”

Friends, I think I’ve made it abundantly, if not annoyingly, clear in these recent weeks how much I love this section of Gospel.

See, here’s the thing: we don’t get a lot of direct access to Jesus preaching and teaching and praying. We get stories. *He went in the garden, or, out into the wilderness to pray.* Or we get narratives *about* him teaching and praying. We get parables.

Now John was written way after Jesus’s bodily time on Earth—but if I let myself accept that by way of resurrection and transcendence the writers of John are honoring the authentic words of Jesus (which I do), then here we get a heaping helping of what Jesus is up to, how he understands his ministry, how he understands *our* call as disciples.

And we could talk for hours about this, and it would be good (trust me), but frankly you have heard me talk so much recently and we have Cathy and Linda here for the first hymns that have reverberated on these walls in quite a while! (Minus my bad singing all day.)

And people feel the spirit in different ways, through different senses and sensibilities, so I’ll try to keep this brief.

I want to talk about prayer. About different types of prayer:

First we have our “Ritual Prayers” –the ones that we can recite from memory.

-“Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed would...” (or)

-“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the lord my soul...” (or)

-(I grew up with this one) “Come lord Jesus be our guest and let this food to us be...”

Some of them, well, we can’t remember a time when we didn’t know them. They are rituals. They are anchors. And they are good. The great Catholic writer Brian Doyle praised ritual as “the skeleton that sustains us when we’re weak.”

And then we have our public prayers...the ones we speak spontaneously, or “ad-lib” for the purpose of sharing... our collective, or corporate, petitions and gratitude for and on behalf of one another. Always considering, in those prayers, who else is in the room. We

have a wonderful ritual of shared prayer after Bible Study that fits this description. And this is what I do in my Pastoral Prayer before the Lord's Prayer. In that prayer, when I say it, YOU matter. I am thinking of you.

So... when do *I* matter?

And how different is my prayer when it is personal and tender and private between Jesus and I. I share my wants and my needs and my desires, my secrets... I share what I tell no other living human being on this Earth, even my closest confidants.

Well, that's quite a different prayer.

I've been spending some good time recently digging into my own understanding, for my own healing, on the ideas of trust and friendship. I did an inventory, as far back as I can remember, of whom I have trusted, when and where, and whom I trust now—and I gotta tell you, I have some good people in my life, but no one comes remotely close to the trust I have in Jesus.

Than the friendship I have with Jesus.

We don't think about that much... that day to day. Oh, but I wish... I could just *give that* to each and every one of you.

But that's the thing: in this farewell discourse, Jesus is actually praying *TO* God, *FOR* his disciples. Not just "on behalf" of his disciples, but *FOR them*.

And we know, friends, yes we know, that we are that are engaged in Christian community are the present manifestation of that living tradition of the disciples. They are, though they wouldn't have phrased it this way, the first "Christians" that we have become. So it's worth letting this sink in:

Jesus is praying for us!

And Jesus is using all three of those types of prayer I feebly attempted to organize earlier—

There is ritual prayer.

There is corporate, or shared prayer for the group.

But (and this is the point I really want to make, so if you've been sleeping up until now, wake up!)

There is personal prayer... for you. Repeat: *Jesus is praying to God for all of those private and personal parts of your life.*

You know all those *tender trusting secrets* I talked about in my personal prayer life? He's holding them, and he is lifting them up to the light and love of God.

Because, Friends, you are unique, and you have a unique, particular, and personal friend of Jesus.

We can go to the shadow side and ask: do I reciprocate that friendship? Do I hold tenderly what Jesus wants to share with me? Can Jesus trust me as a friend? It's worth exploring, but let's stay in the abundance, not the scarcity.

There is a unique character, a unique voice in you that God has created. Now, that sounds about as "self helpish" as it gets, right? "You are special! There is only one you!" ok, roll your eyes, but behind that seeming cliché there is a profound theological understanding that when given healthy space and time to consider, can knock your socks off! God graced you with your unique gifts and interests and heart and mind as a disciple, and is praying for you, that you use them right now!

And I'm not talking about "becoming a Christian" nor "progressing" in faith. I'm talking now!

So often we use this language of "becoming" or "growing" about our faith. Friend, we are! Regardless of what you will become, or what you have been in the past, you are...right now... held in deep love by Jesus.

And Jesus is praying, not for the person that you will become. Not for the person that you once were, but for who you are now. This day...this hour... this breath of your life.

Peace be with you, Friends.

MUSIC

JOYS AND CONCERNS

-To those that have been working on gardens and grounds, thank you! It looks great! Always welcoming helping hands!

-To those of you that have faithfully been sharing their weekly offerings, thank you. A reminder that this church does not have large endowments, but rather relies on what is collected in that plate week by week.

-And to say again, because this recording is going on the internet, we are not lifting up personal names in joys and concerns. If you would like to be on the prayer chain, please contact us.

Memorial Day

PRAYER

MUSIC

BENEDICTION