

***Sharing the Glory***  
**A Sermon on John 17:1-11a**  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**May 24, 2020**

**Introduction**

If you were dying and could leave one last message for your loved ones, what would you say? That is your glory. That is what is most real about you. What if the message is to your church or your preschool class instead of to your loved ones? What would you say to them?

Today's text is sometimes called the last will and testament of Jesus. The models for this in the Old Testament are Jacob and Moses. Jacob blesses his children, the 12 tribes of Israel, when he is on his deathbed. The whole Book of Deuteronomy is a farewell speech that Moses gives to the people of Israel as they are getting ready to cross into the promised land. Moses can't go there with them, so he tells them how to build a righteous society.

Today we call that a spiritual will. You offer words of wisdom and experience to your loved ones.

Jesus knows that his hour has come. In today's text he reviews his life and ministry and asks God to bring down blessings on his disciples.

**First Move: Jesus Prays to Be Glorified**

Jesus has just concluded the Farewell Discourse, which he addressed to his disciples. It takes place during John's version of the Last Supper. Now he lifts his eyes to heaven, a Jewish way of saying that he begins to pray. The prayer is addressed to God, but disciples are still gathered round and can overhear the prayer.

There is no Gethsemane in the Gospel of John. This is a very different prayer. Jesus is not sweating blood, resigning himself to God's will. He looks forward with confidence to returning to God.

Jesus addresses God as Father to show intimacy. It also reflects Jesus' unique relationship as the only son of God.

Jesus says, "The hour has come." It is the hour of his death, resurrection and ascension.

Scholars divide the Book of John into two parts: the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory. The first 12 chapters describe the miracles or signs that show that

Jesus was sent from heaven by God. There are seven signs. They include turning water into wine, walking on water, feeding the 5,000, healing the blind beggar and raising Lazarus from the dead. The Book of Glory begins with John 13:1-3: “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. . . . And during supper Jesus, knowing that . . . he had come from God and was going to God, [got up from the table and washed his disciples’ feet].” The theme of the second half of the Gospel of John is the return of Jesus to the Father. It covers events from Thursday evening through the Resurrection appearances. This return is the glorification of Jesus, hence the name, the Book of Glory.

Jesus only asks for one thing in the verses of the prayer that are included in today’s text. “Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.”

John uses the words glory, presence and name in today’s prayer. They are synonyms. John’s writing style is circular and repetitive.

Glory is a translation of the Greek word δόξα. In Greek secular usage, δόξα means opinion. It came to have a second meaning in the Septuagint, which is Greek translation of the Old Testament. Δόξα was used to translate the Hebrew word *kavod*, which means heavy, weighty. It can also mean presence. The Jewish Publication Society translates *kavod* as presence in today’s Old Testament Lesson; the NRSV translated it as glory. In the New Testament, δόξα nearly always has the second meaning. It describes God’s very essence.

The meaning of glory as honor and reputation again came to predominate after the first century. It is used in almost a triumphalist sense. We sing the Gloria Patri in worship each Sunday; it dates from the second century. It is about praising God: “Glory be to the Father.”

Now we can be put off by talking about glory. It seems unbecoming of a people of humility to talk about glory. It helps to recover the second meaning of glory as another way of expressing the essence of God.

Jesus is confident that God will glorify him through his death, resurrection and ascension. All people will see that Jesus came from God and that Jesus is returning to God.

Jesus gives God two reasons to glorify him. First, Jesus first reviews his earthly ministry. He says that God gave him authority over all flesh. By that, he means that God gave Jesus the power to judge people. Jesus would give life to those who believed that he was from God and he would condemn those who rejected him.

Verse 3 defines what eternal life means in the Gospel of John: “That they might know you, the only true God, and him who you sent, Jesus Christ.” To know God is to be in authentic relationship with God and with Jesus, to share in the life of God and

Jesus. We become part of a holy Trinity. Christians over the centuries have tended to reduce eternal life to meaning that you go to heaven when you die. It is more than that. It is knowing life in all its fullness, now and in the eschaton, when Jesus returns.

Jesus says that he glorified God during his earthly ministry by completing the work that God gave him to do: offering people the gift of eternal life.

God will further glorify Jesus by returning Jesus to God's own side in heaven, where Jesus was when God created the world.

The second reason that Jesus gives for God to glorify him is that he made God's name known to the people that God gave him out of the world. These are the sheep for whom Jesus is the shepherd. Name is another synonym for glory. Jesus made God's essence known to people. Making your name known could also be translated as bringing your name to light. Jesus brings light into the darkness; he makes the invisible God visible for people.

Jesus elevated the disciples by giving them eternal life. They have been lifted out of the banality of everyday existence to share in God's glory. Jesus in turn has been glorified by revealing that he has the power to transform people's lives.

That is a good definition of what we mean when we say that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus reveals God's glory to us, and we are transformed by the encounter.

John 1:14 is a famous verse: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." That is only the first half of the verse. Do you remember the second half? "And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Jesus shows his disciples his glory. And they overhear that as Jesus directs this prayer to God.

## **Second Move: My Prayer for Your Glory**

What would your prayer be as you look back on your life? What is your glory? We might be bashful to use the word *glory* about ourselves. A good translation today would be, what is most authentic, what is really real?

Do you believe that you have experienced the eternal life that Jesus talks about? What wisdom has that experience given you that you can pass on to your spiritual descendants?

I don't think we have to wait until we are on our deathbed to pass on that wisdom.

Since we have been sheltering in place, I have started binge-watching *The Rifleman*. It was my favorite show when I was little. Besides having a hero who could outdraw anyone, what was unique about it in 1958 was the relationship between a single father and his son. The hero was a widower; divorce would have been

a scandal in the 1950s. The violence is a guilty pleasure, but the highlight of the shows for me is the advice that the father passes on to his son in nearly every episode.

I regret that I didn't try to pass on much advice to my daughter when she was growing up. Our modern sensibilities make us uptight about offering advice. We don't want to seem like we are trying to control anyone or influence them.

Advice has to be offered in the right spirit and received in the right spirit. Good advice is wisdom. We are taking a risk by offering it that it will be dismissed or rejected. We are giving something of ourselves when we offer advice; we are making ourselves vulnerable. We can't be afraid to offer advice when it is appropriate.

So in that spirit, I offer my last will and testament to the good and faithful people at Edmond Trinity Christian Church.

I believe in the God of nonviolence. That is what is really real. To be persuasive never coercive. To be calm not angry. To listen not to judge. Those are practices that take us a lifetime to master.

That God is reflected in the Sermon on the Mount, which I believe is the core of the gospel. Love your enemies, turn the other cheek. That God is reflected in the Gospel of John. Love one another as I have loved you. That God is reflected in the lives of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day. Those are my heroes of faith.

I believe that my call is to help you make nonviolence a way of life. John Dear said that our congregations should be laboratories for nonviolence. We need to find ways to heal the divisions that divide people.

We can start by loving the least of these. Every person is a beloved child of God, even the people on death row. I consider Julius Jones to be one of my best friends. I have talked to him by phone an average of twice a week for the past two years. We don't mince words. We share our thoughts and beliefs with each other.

I admire Julius for being able to endure 20 years of solitary confinement. I don't think I could do it. He keeps informed. He watches the news. He reads. He has thoughtful opinions. He is a real person with worth, whether or not the State of Oklahoma thinks so.

Don't be so proud that you can't listen to people who disagree with you. The philosopher John Stuart Mill said in his classic book *On Liberty* that freedom of expression helps us find truth through vigorous debate. No one has a grasp of the whole truth--we only see partial truth. If people listen to a vigorous debate, they will be drawn to a truth that melds valid points from conflicting points of view.

I have asked many people from my graduating class in high school to be friends on FaceBook. Most of them are politically conservative; they support Trump, they are

lifelong Republicans. I hope they keep me honest. They will keep me from being wrapped up in my own little bubble. I hope we can be respectful of each other and help each other find truth. If not, maybe we can at least talk about things we can agree on.

Build up your spiritual lives. Our seminaries are teaching ministers to be prophets of social justice. God knows there is lots of systemic injustice in our country. But I believe our society is suffering from outrage fatigue. We won't have the strength to do social justice work unless we build up our spiritual lives. That means taking time out from social activism to be alone with God and nature. Allow yourself to be filled with awe and wonder when you contemplate God's creation. Give thanks to God for the blessings you have received. We must be righteous if we seek to build a righteous society.

We can't build up democracy just with laws. Don't expect our political leaders to be saviors who will lead us to the kingdom of God. We need to build up the character of our citizens. To have a healthy society, people need to be able to trust and respect each other. If you don't have that, it doesn't matter what laws are in place.

The foundation of a healthy society is healthy churches. People need to be in community with people who will love and support each other and hold each other accountable. People grow and flourish when they are surrounded by other people who are trying to be faithful followers of Christ.

This is a holy place. You have glorified God with your faithfulness. God's spirit runs through this place.

## **Conclusion**

My prayer for you is that you enjoy eternal life, that you be fully alive, seeking connection with God and with each other. And that you help other people find their way to eternal life. Then we all share in the glory of God.

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