



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter 7 (A)

Prayer Is the Answer to Jesus' Prayer

[RCL] Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Jesus prayed. The Gospels reveal that prayer remained the constant refrain of Jesus' life. Jesus prays frequently and fervently. Why would he of all people need to pray? First, Jesus was God made man, and so he had emptied himself to become human and some things were no longer possible for Jesus. For example, if he were in Galilee, he would not also be in Jerusalem. Jesus was bound by time and space. Secondly, Jesus had also always been connected to the Father and the Holy Spirit in ways that are mysterious to us. They are one and yet three. If that is difficult to get your mind around, that is fine. After all, a God you can fully comprehend isn't much of a deity. But we see that Jesus prayed as a part of this ongoing relationship within the Trinity. Finally, Jesus prayed to be an example to his followers. We see this most fully on the night before he died. All of the Gospels tell of Jesus praying fervently that night. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we hear only that Jesus prayed for the cup to pass from him. He did not want to die, but even so, Jesus submitted himself to God's will.

In our Gospel reading, we get a deeper glimpse into Jesus' prayer that evening. In chapter 17 of John's Gospel, which we read part of this morning, Jesus prays. Our reading starts, "Jesus looked up to heaven and said..."

Those words matter, as they tell the reader that what follows is a prayer. The prayer is not written to us. Jesus is talking with God the Father. John gives us not just the content of the prayer, but also the character of Jesus in writing down this prayer for us. Jesus says, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." In John's Gospel, the word glory points to the cross. It is in his faithfulness unto death that Jesus glorified God.

In Jesus' words in this prayer, we learn that Jesus values those who believe in him as a cherished gift from God. And in the final lines of our reading this morning, Jesus prayed, "And 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."

Jesus wanted those who follow him to be protected, not from bodily harm, but from falling away from the faith. And most of all he wanted us to be one as he and the Father are one. This could reduce the prayer to

a plea for Christian unity, but that is not all that is going on here. Yes, Jesus would pray for those who follow him to be one in a way that makes unity among Christian denominations an important goal. But here, Jesus is praying for our protection, and for that to happen, he calls us to be drawn into the relationship of love that is the very Trinity. Jesus and the Father are one in a way that goes beyond simple agreement, like, or love. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one at their essence through relationship. Jesus prays for that sort of deeper relationship for us. This is Jesus' prayer before dying; his dying wish is for those who know him to be drawn into an abiding connection to him and his Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had already demonstrated what an abiding connection to God looks like. Throughout his life, he had taken regular times for prayer both public and private—both liturgical prayers of synagogue and Temple worship and spontaneous prayers offered on various occasions. Jesus maintained his connection to God in good times and bad, in times of triumph, and in the agony of the cross.

With only a few years in which to change the world forever, Jesus should have been a workaholic. Yes, he was faulted for breaking the Sabbath to heal and for letting his disciples pick grain to eat. But instead of being a workaholic, Jesus enabled others to minister as well.

We find in the Gospel what Jesus prayed, but we should also notice *that* Jesus prayed. His life is soon to end. He is in the last hours with his disciples. Rather than fitting in an all-night cram session to get the last bit of theological information into his disciples' heads, Jesus pauses and prays. If you ever wonder what would Jesus do, the primary answer is that Jesus would pray. How much more should we first and foremost pray in all the chances and changes that life sends our way?

God will honor the arrow prayers you shoot heavenward in times of need, but you will find yourself more fully connected to God if you set aside routine times to pray. The pattern for The Episcopal Church is found in the brief Morning and Evening Prayer liturgies in the Book of Common Prayer, and even in the one-page devotions tucked into the Prayer Book. Making daily times for these prayers will not earn God's favor; you already have been given that grace freely. Instead, the daily times of prayer will ground your day in connection to the Holy Trinity.

This was Jesus' will for you. Jesus wanted you to find and nurture that deep, abiding connection to God. Jesus wanted it so much that he prayed for you to get that sort of relationship and then he trusted his Father in heaven to enable it to happen. Your answer to Jesus' prayer is found when you make time to pray and so grow closer to the God who knows you fully and loves you completely.

*This sermon was written by **the Rt. Rev. Frank Logue**, then-canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of Georgia, in 2017.*