

Seventh Sunday After Easter
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
5-21-2023

John 17:1-11

Today in our Church we celebrate Graduation Sunday. We celebrate all of our children who are going through a special educational or vocational transition in our lives. And as customary, we will have a guest speaker from our youth tell us what Saint Dunstan's has meant to them. For this reason, I promised the staff that I was going to keep my remarks short.

For the last two weeks we discussed at length the beginning of Jesus' Farewell speech in John, Chapter 14. Today, we are at the first eleven verses of the last chapter of that speech. In fact, Chapter 18:1 starts, "After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered." So, since there are some of the last words of a dying man, we need to pay closer attention to them. I have been blessed to accompany many folks during their last hours of life, and I know that what a person says during those last hours is of utmost importance.

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." Jesus makes it very clear that the main reason why he came to earth was to take possession of what the Father had given him. Of utmost importance to him was the people the Father gave him. He has come to give them eternal life. Jesus is the "Eternal Life" giver. This is his mission. This is the reason he is about to walk to the mountain of sacrifice. Eternal Life is a gift to us, but to him it was very costly.

But Jesus goes beyond. He tells his people exactly what eternal life means. Yes, it is a place, but it is primarily a relationship. He says, "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life takes place when a believer has developed a relationship with God, the Father, through his Son, Jesus Christ. Those who know Christ, know the Father because the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Those who believe will one day be with Christ, they will be in him, and he will be in them for eternity. This is eternal life. A loving relationship with our Messiah that lasts forever. And this relationship is developing by placing all our faith and all our aspirations on Christ and Christ alone.

Jesus says, “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.” Christ made himself known to us and our salvation is dependent on knowing him. Now, he returns to assume the glory he had from the very beginning of everything. But he leaves us with a mission, which is nothing else than bringing others to a full knowledge of Christ. We need to make Christ known in the world. The salvation of the world depends on a relationship, and we have to be the matchmakers, In the same way that The Holy Spirit is the eternal matchmaker leading us to Christ, and Christ to us, we must be earthly matchmakers, bringing those who do not know Christ to a saving relationship to him.

Jesus tells his father in this priestly prayer, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.” It is for this reason that Jesus asks for the unity of the believer with God and with each other. “May they love each other as you love me and I love you!” The last concern of Jesus in John is for the unity of his church. Yet, the church is more divided now than it has been at any point in history. If you don’t believe me, look at what’s happening to the Methodists, and remember what has been happening to us over the last 20 or 30 years. There are hundreds of groups and denominations in the United States that bare the name, “Anglican.” Ironically, our church has grown by division. We have lost members in the Episcopal Church, and some of the groups that have separated from us, but when you add all of them up and gather them all under the name “Anglican” our numbers look much better.

Jesus wants the unity of the Church, but this unity can not be uniformity. It is okay that we are uniquely ourselves and they are uniquely themselves. We can still have a commonality of mission, even if we have different modes of being. I respect and love other Anglicans, regardless of the alphabet soup of their names and denominations. Jesus’ call to love today is a call to reduce polarization. The world is not divided into “them” and “us” but rather, it is divided between those who know Christ and those who do not know Christ. Our mission and their mission is the same: We are to make Christ known. Our methods may be different, but our mission is the same.

As we approach the anniversary of the split that fractured our communion and created great resentment and pain across the country, let us make a vow today. Let us reduce our animosity towards those who left, and let us pray that they may reduce their animosity towards us. I invite you to pray for all Anglicans around the

world, regardless of who they are and who they separated from. We are more alike than we are unlike, as a wise poet once said. Let us pray that God will give them and us the love necessary to be shining beacons of hope in a world filled with despair. May they make Christ known, that the whole world may come within the reach of Christ's saving Embrace.

On this "Unity Sunday" let us pray for a unity of mission and a commonality of faith. Their Savior is our Savior and their vocation is our vocation. May God continue to bless them and may God continue to bless us. Amen!