

Title: God's Love Abounds

Text: John 17:20-26

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If you were in your final day of your life, what would you say to your friends and family? What would you want them to hear from you? That moment is what Jesus faced in today's text.

John wants us to catch a glimpse into just such a precious moment in Jesus' life with his disciples. In the Upper Room, Jesus' speaks his final farewell words in his version of the Upper Room encounter. These words bring focus of the disciples' mission and purpose as they live into the vision of God's community and kingdom on earth. These words provide strength, hope, and experience to us through Jesus' powerful prayer before his arrest and crucifixion.

Let us use a driving analogy. Jesus looks into and sees in the rearview mirror the last three years in intense ministry with his disciples and various crowds that were following him. He made a name for himself as a healer and teacher. Thousands of people had heard his message and seen his miracles. Yet, as he looks forward, he sees through the front glass his impending death and this looms large in his mind. That's where we are in today's text, and as we sit in the driver's seat, we are processing all this information through Jesus' context. Into this rearview glance and forward look, John places Jesus into the driver's seat, and before his impending struggle with the authorities and die, John wants us to hear Jesus' last words before his trial and death.

So, now listen with fresh ears as Jesus begins his final prayer. He says, "My prayer is not for (my disciples) alone. I pray also for those who **will believe** in me through the (disciples) message..." This sentence in his prayer is Jesus' commission to his followers. He is praying first for his disciples, and then he's praying "for those who will believe in [him] through their message." Friends, that is us! I find it comforting that in Jesus' final thoughts and prayer he includes us.

What is John's motivation to include us? Why would Jesus pray this prayer? We were not even born. We were not there to hear his message! We did not witness his miracles. Why would John want us to know Jesus remembered us in those last intimate moments?

One reason is found in the lectionary paring with this text. In Revelation 22, the writer says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and end." This prayer in John's gospel taps into that same source by stating clearly there was more to Jesus' life than the immediate. God's agenda always is much bigger than our immediate moment, our now! Jesus wanted us to know that we are an integral part of God's work in this world, and when our eyes include a kingdom view, the parenthesis of God's love abounds in our lives which increases to include ALL time and space.

Allow me to use a sports metaphor. In football, a coach will use the phrase: "Next man up." This metaphor means that every player should be ready to step in to get the collective job done. At any moment, a player may be called upon to enter the game. Injury can cause this. A special situation requires someone's skills to step in. Before the game, the coach and team don't know what the situation may require. So, we need to always stand at the ready expecting the coach to call upon us to enter the game at a moment's notice.

This “next man up” allows a team the opportunity to win even after an injury or simply being tired. For the game clock continues to run and does not slow down. Just like football, no matter what, God’s work goes on in the mission and ministry in the universal church! Jesus’ prayer reminds us that we must be ready to do our part in working for God’s kingdom. That is our being part of a team. In his final prayer with his disciples, he reminds them that there is plenty of work for us to do, and we are included in Jesus’ prayer because he knows how much impact we will have for the Kingdom of God.

Allow me to say it another way by asking us a question. Why was Christ’s last prayer with his disciples including us? Simply, Jesus knows there is ongoing work to be done, and we are an integral part of that undertaking. So, Jesus’ necessary prayer was to include and encourage us.

While Jesus’ prayer includes us, there is something important to notice. Notice in Jesus’ prayer that God will give us what we need to succeed.

While I don’t think God causes us pain and suffering, I do think God uses those experiences that seem negative in ways to help and witness to others. God didn’t want me to be divorced, but I am. And here is how the God of my understanding redeems that broken part of me that is divorce. God’s given me opportunities to listen and bear witness to the hope of God’s redeeming love through those dark valley’s shadows as my marriage fell apart. I’ve learned so much and thankful for the teachings that God’s shown me during that dark period of my life. I exceedingly grateful for God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness of my mistakes. Friends, God redeemed what I could not. God will redeem those broken parts of your life, too, if you are open to listening for God’s presence in your pain.

You may have some struggle going on right now, but I want you to hear that over time it will be okay. You are not alone. God is with you; we as Christ’s body love you and want what’s best for you. What I learned through my divorce is that most “challenging task” was my trusting, hoping, and waiting for God’s revelation to occur. But it did happen, and it will happen to you as well. While you are in the pain and the waiting is hard, but if you are patient long enough, God’s plan will be revealed in God’s time, not mine. What I learned I share with you now. I realized my job was twofold. First to keep my heart and mind open for the people and events which are bearers of hope and love. Second, I must listen and wait for God’s presence. If I don’t have it at this moment, I must trust I don’t need it or I am not seeing it for some reason. Through listening, I become aware of my dependence on God.

Maybe a quick example will help unpack what I mean. Pat loved to surf. However, one day when he was surfing, he was hit by a large wave, which injured his spine and left him quadriplegic.

Pat spent months in physical therapy and traded his surfboard for a wheelchair. After the accident he had trouble understanding why God would allow him to endure this loss of use of his arms and legs. Then Pat’s church joined a ministry of the *Wounded Warrior Project*. This ministry provides lunch and a listening ear to injured service members at Walter Reed Medical Center outside our nation’s capital.

Pat soon discovered that his disability allowed him to earn the trust of the injured soldiers in a way the upright people could not. They saw that he understood their suffering and their scars, and they listened to him when he told them about how God has given him strength. Pat looks at this ministry as a place where God can redeem his disability. God uses Pat and God will use us.

Pat ends his story by saying, “It’s a God thing. I feel called.” Friends, God didn’t cause Pat to be paralyzed. Yet, God can redeem his paralysis. Pat kept open, and God redeemed his situation in a way that otherwise would not have happened. Pat listened and heard God’s grace which allowed Pat to use his disability in the service of others. God gave Pat what he needed: an open heart and listening spirit to help others. Through Pat God’s love abounds to others to accomplish God’s good purposes (“God’s Call” by Melissa Lauber, *Ministry Matters*, Dec. 27, 2011, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2204/gods-call>).

What is God calling you to do? You may say, “I don’t know any calling I am qualified for.” Let me challenge us with this truth. **God does not call the qualified; God qualifies the called.** (repeat) In our text this morning in verses 25-26, he says, *“Righteous (Abba) Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

In this whole Jesus prayer, we come to realize we must not rely on our own talent, strength, or intellect to do God’s will. God’s power works in and through us to allow us to have an impact on the world. If our God is love, it stands to reason that when we are at one with God our whole being is love too. That was Jesus’ point two weeks ago when he gave us the eleventh commandment, “To love one another as I’ve loved you.”

One last point to consider this morning. **Jesus’ final prayer is a reminder that we are supposed to work together – in UNITY – to abound in God’s love for others.** That is our mission and purpose as a church. We are to be united in our love for and with others. This last prayer of Jesus is often called the “Unity Prayer.” Jesus knew that a unified effort multiplies our individual efforts far beyond what we could accomplish on our own.

Zig Ziglar often shared a story about the Giant Belgian horse. A breed of horse that can stand 7 feet tall and weigh as much as 3,000 pounds. Alone, the Giant Belgian horse can pull approximately 7,000 pounds. However, harness him to another Giant Belgian and together they can pull over 15,000 pounds. Sounds impressive, doesn’t it?

But here is the curious thing. Horse trainers learned that when you teach them to work together as a “united” pair, they can pull an astonishing 25,000 pounds. Friends, our teamwork matters because we are not individuals playing in this game alone. We accomplish so much more with good training and by our working together. The two horses together produces only slightly more than their sum. The real story, the compelling story, is when the horses get on the same page and start pulling together as a unit: that’s where we see amazing things being done. God will do so much more with our unity.

In the 22 verse of today’s text Jesus says: *“I have given them the glory you gave me – the glorious unity of being one, as we are – I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one – so that the world will know you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.”* As Christ’s body, we are to exhibit unity.

And nothing is more important than our unity in Christ. Our unity will prove to the whole world that Jesus is the Son of God, and that God loves us and this world. There is more work to do to spread the message of Jesus’ love around the world. We are an integral to God’s plan for the

world. Like the Belgian horses, our teaming together unites us and multiplies our efforts far beyond what we could accomplish on our own.

This table, Jesus' table, is a visual reminder that we are all needed and wanted. We see in this sacrament a powerful, tangible reminder of God's love expressed. Let's re-member, let's join once again at this table, with those disciples and hear Jesus' words cheering us forward. Let's be ready to step up into the game to share God's love with the world. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination

Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your Word; give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom; through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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(Jesus prayed), "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

"Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."