

Kept in His Name

The 7th Sunday of Easter

John 17:1-11 with Acts 1:12-26 and 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

There is a moment in John's Gospel that doesn't get nearly the attention it deserves. It happens after the Last Supper, before Gethsemane — before the arrest, the trials, the cross. Jesus lifts his eyes toward heaven and begins to pray. Not for himself, but rather for us.

What we overhear in John 17 is sometimes called the High Priestly Prayer. That's a good name for it. A high priest stands between God and the people, brings both parties before each other, intercedes. And that is precisely what Jesus is doing — with full knowledge of what is coming, with the cup of suffering already visible on the horizon, he prays. And what he prays reveals, more than almost anything else in the Gospels, the heart of who he is and what he came to do.

The first thing to notice is that Jesus is not anxious. "Father, the hour has come." That is not dread. That is arrival.

Think of a surgeon who has spent years training for a particular, complex procedure. The morning it finally comes, something settles in them — not because the operation isn't dangerous, but because they have been moving toward this moment their whole career. They scrub in, they step through those doors, and there is a composure that comes not from the absence of risk but from complete readiness. That is the posture of Jesus here. The hour has come. He steps into it.

He asks the Father to glorify him — and he says why: "so that the Son may glorify you." Glory for glory. Light kindling light. Jesus is asking that the cross, this terrible and beautiful hour, would be the full and final disclosure of who God is. The love displayed there is not a revised plan. It IS the plan. It IS what God looks like.

Then Jesus says something that should stop us in our tracks: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

We spend a good deal of energy talking about eternal life as a destination — something that waits for us on the other side of death. And that isn't wrong. But Jesus defines it as something else entirely. Not a location. Not a duration, but rather a relationship. Knowing the Father. Knowing the Son.

There's a difference between knowing about a place and actually knowing someone from there. You can read every guidebook ever written about a city — its history, its streets, its food — and still be a stranger to it. But if you have a friend who grew up there, who takes you through their old neighborhood, who pulls a chair out for you at their family's table — that's an entirely different kind of knowing. One is information. The other is belonging.

Eternal life, in Jesus' definition, is belonging to God. And that belonging, he implies, is available now. Not merely after death. Not merely in some far-off heaven, but here. This is not preparation for eternal life. This IS eternal life. Begun here. Completed there. But real and present and active now.

Jesus then turns to speak about his disciples, and the language he uses is striking. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me." Twice in just a few verses he returns to this: they are yours, they are mine, they are yours.

Anyone who has spent time in a hospital waiting room knows what it feels like to hear your name called. All around you are people in their own fog of worry, and then — your name, spoken by someone who has been tracking you, who knows you are there, who has come specifically for you. In all the noise and confusion, you have been found. That is the language Jesus uses here. You are not a general category in God's economy. You are not a statistic. You are a name: Given; Known; Claimed. Handed from Father to Son and back again.

And then, knowing what is about to happen, Jesus prays: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

He is leaving. He knows he is leaving. And his concern in this final prayer is not for himself — it is for us. Keep them. Protect them. Hold them together.

Now here is the thing that ought to change the texture of every ordinary day: that prayer did not end on the night it was prayed. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the risen Christ "always lives to make intercession" for us. Think of a watchman — someone whose specific job is to stay alert through the night, to keep an eye on what threatens, to hold the perimeter while the household sleeps. That is the ministry of the ascended Christ. He is the one on watch. You may forget him; he does not forget you. You may drift into distraction or despair; he does not drift. Right now, as you sit in this pew, the living Christ is before the Father on your behalf.

The disciples understood something of this — or at least they were learning it. After the Ascension, they return to Jerusalem and do the only thing that makes sense when Jesus has told you to wait: Together, they pray, and pray persistently. Luke tells us they were "constantly devoting themselves to prayer." The community of those who had been prayed for became a community of prayer. They had been held together by Jesus throughout his ministry — he was the center of their common life. Now, without his physical presence, they discover that they are still held. The prayer of John 17 is already doing its work. They are one. They are together. They choose a new apostle, fill the gap left by Judas, and carry on. Not because they are impressive people, but because they are kept people.

Peter, who later writes to scattered and suffering believers, knows this keeping firsthand. He urges them not to be surprised by the fiery ordeal — as though suffering were something foreign to God's purposes. "Resist him," he says of the enemy, "steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." You are not alone. You are not forgotten. And then — one of the most beautiful sequences in all the

epistles: "The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."

God himself will do it. He won't send a delegate from a distance. He won't assign it to an intermediary. God will do it Himself, and He will do it personally.

That is the God who prays for us in John 17. That is the Father to whom the Son says, keep them. That is the one into whose hands Peter says we entrust ourselves, because he is a faithful Creator.

What does it mean, then, to live this week as a person who is being prayed for by the Son of God? It means you can release the anxiety about whether you are enough. It means you can resist the enemy not in your own strength but in the confidence of one who is upheld. It means the suffering — the real, genuine suffering that many of you carry right now — is not evidence that God has forgotten you. It is precisely the territory where the keeping promise holds.

He cares for you. That is not a platitude. It is the testimony of the one who prayed for you before he walked to a cross.

Eternal life is knowing God. And knowing God means knowing this: you are his. He is not letting go.

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