

So That They May Be One

May 17, 2026

John 17:1-11

¹When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. ²You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. ³This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. ⁴I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.

⁶“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

⁹“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. ¹¹I’m no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I’m coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.

1st Peter 4:12-14 and 5:6-11

¹²Dear friends, don’t be surprised about the fiery trials that have come among you to test you. These are not strange happenings. ¹³Instead, rejoice as you share Christ’s suffering. You share his suffering now so that you may also have overwhelming joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are mocked because of Christ’s name, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory — indeed, the Spirit of God — rests on you...

⁶ Therefore, humble yourselves under God's power so that he may raise you up in the last day. ⁷ Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you. ⁸ Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith. Do so in the knowledge that your fellow believers are enduring the same suffering throughout the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be power forever and always. Amen.

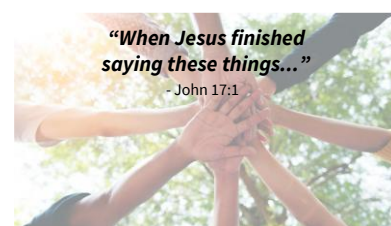


Over the course of these five weeks since Easter, we have been in a series called “Stories That Matter.” Each Sunday has focused on the stories of faith that we read in the Bible and on the stories of our faith that are our personal faith stories. All of these stories matter because they are how we come to understand and to grow in our relationship with Jesus and with one another. We are called to be the community of faith because we are stronger believers, we are better disciples, and we more faithfully reflect Jesus to the world when we are walking together in faith. Today we turn to John 17 and 1st Peter 4 and 5.

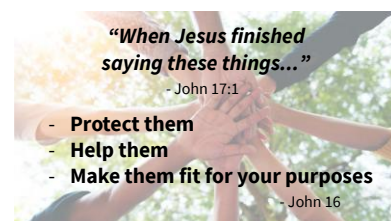
In John 17 we find Jesus' prayer. This prayer thanks God for how Jesus glorified the Father, for the disciples that God gave Jesus, and it asks God to watch over and to unify the disciples as one. In our two 1st Peter passages we find the “why” in chapter 4 – why the disciples need God and unity. In chapter 5 we see “how” to build unity, and we see “what” unity in faith leads to for all who follow Jesus. As we prepare to work through these three passages, culminating in the sharing of our personal stories of faith, let us pray...

Loving God, Creator of all things, you have raised Christ to rule at the heart of the human story, present in all beings, through the Spirit of love to bless us, keep us and lead us in your ways. May your Word may be made flesh again in Scripture, in our worship, and in all our lives and in our living. Open our hearts, God, and speak to us. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

Our gospel passage begins with these words: *“When Jesus finished saying these things.”* This is an invitation to look back, to find out what things Jesus just said. It is important that we respond to this

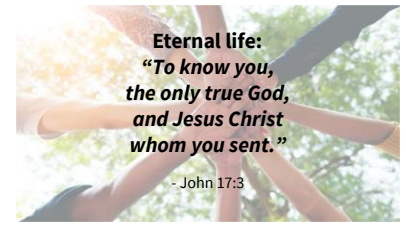


prompting of the Spirit because it gives us context for what we are reading today. “These things” come towards the end of the farewell discourse that we touched on last Sunday. Far from being all that Jesus has just finished saying, here are the main three, relative to today’s readings: protect them, help them, and make them fit for your purposes. As you hopefully reflected on and worked out your story of faith this past week, I’d guess that you remembered times when God did each of these things in your life. All three are essential to living faithfully in this world.



Continuing in verses 1-5, Jesus acknowledges that the time has come for him to depart this world so that he can return to heaven. He prays that the time immediately ahead will glorify God. And then, in verses 2-3, Jesus slips into the third person. Here we are reminded that God *“gave him authority”* over all things so that *“he could give eternal life”* to all who have been given to Jesus as disciples. The authority that God gave Jesus is what allows the Spirit to protect and help and lead and guide us to live for God’s purposes in this life.

In the next verse Jesus defines “eternal life” this way: *“to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.”* Jesus is not talking about what we call “heaven” here. He is talking about the here and now. Jesus is connecting back to last Sunday’s

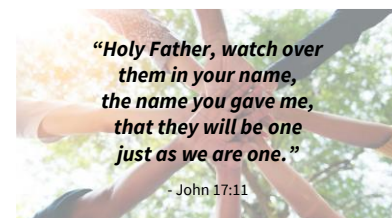


words. To “know” Jesus is to love Jesus. To love Jesus is to keep his commands to love God and one another. We begin to experience eternal life here on earth as we live out the command to love. Living as Christ’s example, we get a glimpse of the life to come.

In verses 4 and 5 Jesus returns to glorification and to the first person. In verse 4 we see how Jesus understands glorifying God. In this verse we read, *“I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”* Jesus brought God glory by revealing what it looks and feels like to love God and neighbor fully, unconditionally, selflessly. In turn we must ask, what do we do that brings God glory? We too bring God glory by doing the work that God has given us to do. It’s really simple. It is, again, obeying or following the two great commands: loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbors as Jesus first loved us. This a daily, sometimes moment by moment, choice. Do we choose to surrender self in order to love God or neighbor? Or do we choose to love self, placing God and others below our own wants and desires? When we choose love, again and again, we bring all the glory to God. Doing so, we and others begin to experience the kingdom of God – a taste of eternal life – here on earth.

Starting in verse 6, Jesus focuses on the disciples, thanking God for them. They have been given to Jesus, and they have kept God’s word. They know the intimate connection between Jesus and God. All that Jesus has said and done has come from God. The disciples heard and received the words of Jesus, and, therefore, the words of God. Understanding this connection, the disciples have come to believe that Jesus was sent by God into the world.

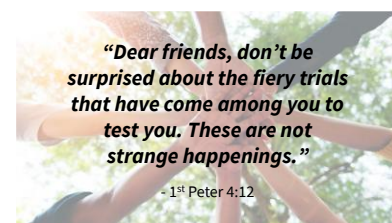
Jesus then prays for the disciples. He recognizes that the disciples and everything else that God has given to Jesus are not just his, but they are God's as well. This is the flip side of the coin from last week, when we talked about how God was in Jesus and how we are in Jesus, so we are in God and God is in us. All that are Jesus' disciples belong to God too. And then, in verse 11, Jesus offers this prayer for all who are his disciples: *"Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one."* There are two parts to this prayer. First, *"watch over them."* This ties into the earlier request for the Spirit to protect, help, lead, and guide us to live for God's purposes in this life.



The second part is this: *"That they will be one just as we are one."* This is a prayer for a deep, intimate, personal connection between all of the members of the body of faith. This is not a prayer that we'll get along and will mostly accept one another. This is not a prayer that we will watch out for and help one another when we can or when it is easy. This is a prayer that asks God to connect us so closely together that love is the only thing that guides every word, every action, every choice, every decision. This is a prayer asking God to help us love one another so completely that it is as if Jesus himself is loving each of us. To love in this way – fully, unconditionally, selflessly – it is very hard. But it is the core of who we are to be as disciples of Jesus Christ. To help understand the "why" and the "how" and the "what," please turn with me to 1st Peter 4 and 5.



In 1st Peter 4, we see why it is so important that we are as one. Peter gets right to it: *"Dear friends, don't be surprised about the fiery trials that have come among you to test you..."*



These are not strange happenings.” For first century Christians, fiery trials were simply a part of following Christ in a culture dominated by the Jewish and Roman religions. Testing was and is still a common part of our faith journey. While we are less familiar with the kinds of “fiery trials” experienced by the earliest Christians, we are very familiar with the fiery trials that we associate with the testing of our faith. In this sense, I believe that when we are tested in our faith, whether by sin or circumstance, it often feels like a fiery trial in the moment.

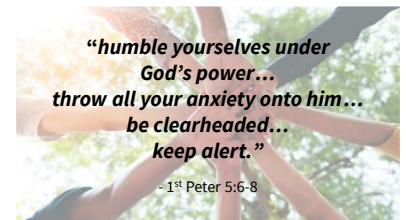
When we are struggling with a sin or when someone has sinned against us and we are struggling with forgiveness or reconciliation or when we find ourselves in the valley, it can test our faith. In these situations, the Holy Spirit can figuratively turn up the fire, causing unease, anxiousness, worry, guilt, shame, and other things that make us acutely aware of the tension and struggle. When we are faithful and confess and repent or extend grace and mercy, then we experience a refining of our faith. The testing yields a stronger or purer faith in the end. Unfortunately, these are not, as Peter says, “strange happenings.” Living as imperfect creatures in a fallen world, we frequently find ourselves in the fire, so to speak.

The refining and strengthening of our faith that comes through the trials and valleys is often a blessing in the end. No, we would not choose to walk that hard road if it were up to us, but when we look back, we can often see how we grew as a disciple or how we deepened our faith in Christ. From this perspective, we can understand what Peter is getting at when he writes to the earliest believers, encouraging them to *“rejoice as you share in Christ’s suffering.”*

Peter adds a second way that Christians can suffer – mockery. Again, this is not something that we experience very often in our time and place. Yes, the earliest disciples surely did.

And certainly Christians in other parts of the world can experience mockery and worse. But sometimes, we can choose to risk being mocked. When we stand or speak against an injustice or other evil, we risk mockery or ridicule or being targeted ourselves. When we share certain thoughts in the social media world, lifting up the way or words of Jesus, we can risk bringing on the unkind words of those who might not see politics or human rights or whatever the same way we do. These are choices we make. I would be lying if I said I did not think about these things when scrolling Facebook or whatever. But at times, the Spirit will lead us to speak or post or stand, knowing that a fiery trial might be headed our way.

As we turn to verses 6-1 from chapter 5, we turn to Peter's advice on how to make our way through the fiery trials and struggles and about what happens when we do stand faithfully. In verses 6-8 we get four pieces of advice on how to conduct ourselves to avoid a trial or to get through a trial if we find ourselves in one. Here are the four pieces of advice: "*humble yourselves under God's power... throw all your anxiety onto him... be clearheaded... keep alert.*" Great advice, not always easy to follow, but important to remember.



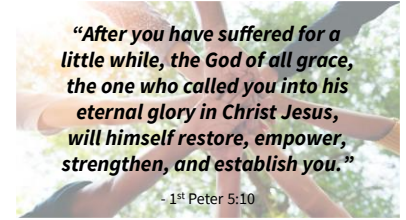
First, humble ourselves under God's power. I don't know about you, but when I am starting to get in trouble, my first thought is to handle it myself. My first thoughts should be prayer, surrender, turning to other trusted believers, and admitting my weakness, sin, or limitations. To do these things requires humility. It is not always easy to admit we need help, especially in our current culture, but trying to go it alone, out of arrogance or pride or whatever, is a recipe for disaster, not success. Step one: humbly turn to God and others. Acknowledge and accept the power found in the Spirit and in the community of faith.

Step two: don't worry. Instead of being anxious or afraid or fearful or any other emotion that is negative, turn all of these emotions over to God. I think this is an extension of step one. Maybe not you, but I can humbly and wholeheartedly seek God's help and other people's help and still worry, fret, doubt... To turn these emotions over to God is also an act of surrender and an act of faith. To say and believe that God can and will care for me and love me and provide for me and guide me and forgive me and... allows me to release the worry, fears, doubts, and so on. To choose to give these things to God is a step of faith.

Steps three and four are related. The charge to be clear-headed and to keep alert is a call to awareness – an awareness of self and an awareness of the world around us. As stated earlier, we are fallen creatures living in a broken world. Therefore, we are prone to sin. The human, fleshy part of us naturally seeks pleasure and is selfish if left unchecked. We need to be aware of this. In addition to this potential for self-inflicted trouble, Peter notes, *“Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Satan is always looking to get us off track, to turn away from God, to give in to the ways of the world. This is a constant battle. It requires clear-headedness and it requires vigilance, alertness. If we do not resist and stand firm in our faith, we quickly find ourselves separated from God.

Lastly, we turn to the 'what' – to what happens when we are faithful to God. To what happens when we live with God's protection and help and in accordance with God's purposes. To what happens when we love God and neighbor with all that we are. To what happens when we do the work that God gives us to do. To what happens when we strive to live as one with the community of faith. To what happens when we endure the testing of our faith. To what happens when we humbly surrender our lives – and control – to God. To what happens when we live with eyes wide open, aware of our tendency to sin and of the temptation of Satan.

In verse 10 we read, *“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you.”* This is what happens when we are faithful to loving God and neighbor with all of our hearts. And our story, my friends, is what comes from this journey of faith.



Last week you were invited to think about, prepare, and practice your story of faith. If you did so, you likely thought about times of trial or testing or suffering and about how God led you through. If you did give time and effort to developing your story of faith, you likely thought about how you have been changed or transformed as you have journeyed with Christ. This is the “before and after” part of your faith story. As we journey in faith, we all experience times when God restores, empowers, strengthens, and establishes our faith. This is your story of faith. This is my story of faith. There are index cards and writing utensils in the little card holders on the back of the chairs. As this song plays, I invite you to put your story to paper.

If you are willing to share your story, please drop it in the plate on the way out of the Sanctuary. Names are not required. Please know that I will read through them and try to come up with a collective story of our church’s faith. Then I will place them on the back windows, as a way to share our stories of faith as Steve and Prairey did in recent weeks. After a couple of weeks you will be invited to take your card if you would like to. And, finally, why am I asking you to do this? Well, first, it is what we are told to do in the Bible. Second, it helps us to become one body, united in our faith. Sharing and knowing one another’s stories build connection in the body of Christ. So... Please, please, please take a few minutes to tell your story of faith. How has Jesus changed your life?

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Practicing reconciliation is not easy but it rebuilds community. With whom could you practice the art of reconciliation this week? What is your first step?
- 2) *Pray*. Walking the road of unity takes great effort. What is your greatest struggle when thinking about unity in the body of Christ? Spend some time in prayer!
- 3) *Study*. Read John 17:12-23. What echoes of our 1st Peter readings do you hear in these words of Jesus? When have you experienced the things that Jesus prays for here?