

John 17:1-11

## GLORY BE TO GOD!

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a group of men decided that if America were to be a mighty nation, the West must be united to the East by a transcontinental railroad. So they began to lay the track. The project began in both the East and the West and moved toward a common meeting place. In 1869 the day arrived for the final spike to be driven into the finished lines of track. A gold spike was made and Leland Stanford lifted the sledgehammer to deliver the unifying blow. The telegraph operators waited with their fingers hovered above the keys that would signal the message to the world. History will not forget that Mr. Stanford on his first try swung and missed the spike. Everybody stood breathlessly waiting. Unperturbed, Stanford lifted the hammer again and this time the spike was driven deeply and decisively. The East and the West were united. The telegraphs clicked for the message, just four letters: D-O-N-E! Done! (Richard C. Hoefler, *At Noon on Friday*, pp. 32-33)

In similar fashion, some two thousand years earlier, that was the message Jesus conveyed – DONE! – in his farewell message to his disciples and in his closing prayer to God the Father there in the Upper Room. Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to a close; he had completed almost all of the work that God had assigned him to do. Tomorrow night, Jesus would be "done, dead, and gone" – sealed in a cold, dark tomb.

By this time in the narrative, Judas Iscariot had slipped out and had set in motion the events that would soon lead to Jesus' arrest, trial, suffering, and subsequent death on the cross. Whereas the golden railroad spike, when driven home, led to the uniting of the East and the West, the spikes, which would be driven through Jesus' flesh and into the cross on Friday, would result – somehow - in uniting sinful humanity with the holy God. The end was in sight; the finish line drew nearer; and Jesus knew his work on earth was almost complete.

It's in this context that Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." The hour toward which his life had been heading was at hand, meaning the time of his arrest, trial, crucifixion and death, his resurrection and related appearances, and finally culminating in his ascension. This was the hour at hand!

In this opening petition of Jesus' concluding prayer, no less than six times, Jesus prayed and asked to glorify the Father while, at the same time, God the Father would glorify Jesus in the soon-to-be turn of events. Throughout his life and his ministry, and now in these final hours, Jesus sought to glorify God; that is to say, Jesus revealed or manifested God's character, God's presence, purpose, and power to his disciples and all others. When people looked at Jesus, they saw the glory – the presence of God. In last Sunday's gospel reading, we heard Jesus say, "If you know me, you will know my Father also... Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:7-9).

At the same time, as Jesus faced the cross and his pending death, Jesus prayed that God would glorify the Son – that God would reveal the divine majesty specifically in the events of Jesus' death, resurrection, and departure. And, in the process, Jesus' disciples already have eternal life, which is an intimate, personal relationship with God (as revealed by Jesus) both now and beyond death; after all, as was said earlier, to know and love Jesus is to know and love God for the Father and Son are one.

In this high priestly prayer that Jesus prayed, there was a shift as Jesus prayed for his disciples in the hostile world. He prayed for their protection as they faced dangers both from the intolerance of the religious authorities and persecution by way of Rome. Jesus acknowledged that his disciples, his followers in every age, were gifts from God – "they were yours, and you gave them to me... they know that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me... and I have been glorified in them.." As we listen in on this prayer that Jesus prayed, we soon realize that he wasn't simply praying for the eleven remaining disciples in the Upper room. No, Jesus was and still is praying for us and all other future disciples as well! He prayed then, and he prays even now, for his disciples as they/we carry on his mission (with the help of the Holy Spirit!).

After all, Jesus not only prayed that the Son may glorify the Father, and vice versa, Jesus also prayed

that his disciples would continue to glorify God. Again, Jesus prayed, "I have been glorified in them." Whereas Christ glorifies God and the Father glorifies the Son, Jesus is praying and saying that we have been given the high privilege and tremendous responsibility of glorifying God on earth. We have been chosen and called to be the means by which God's presence is made known today among all people. As Christ reflects the presence of God on earth, so we – in Christ – are to reflect and show forth the living presence and loving compassion of God on earth in our day.

Someone has said that "we are God's glory; we are the clothes God puts on to show himself to the world. We are God's garments, by which God shows his glory, himself, his presence to our world. Every morning when we get up and put on our clothes to begin the day, we should remind ourselves that God wants us to be his clothes, his wardrobe. He wants our lives to be his glory and show it forth. He wants our lives – what we say and do – to reflect his forgiveness, his generosity, his patience, his kindness, his care, his love for all people." (Richard C. Hoefler, *With Wings of Eagles*, pp. 86-87)

In works of love and acts of kindness and compassion, and, most of all, in lives full of grace and truth – that is where God's glory is revealed. When we act just like Christ Jesus in our attitudes and actions toward others, they may just catch a glimpse of the glory of God set loose in the world. When we respect and are kind to others on a daily basis that gives glory to God. When we forgive others, just like we have been forgiven, then, glory be to God! When we say "No, no more," to racial slurs, to gossip, to mean-spirited conversations, then, glory be to God. When we show care and concern to the abused and the oppressed – to the least of these in Christ's family, then, we give glory to God. When we offer a cup of water, a Butterfly Tree gift, or a listening ear to someone in need, then, glory be to God! When we imitate Jesus Christ, glory be to God.

Everyone else in her group at school left the new girl to herself at lunch. She was new, from another part of the world. She never spoke in class and when she did, few could understand her, with her strange way of talking, her accent. So when she got up and moved over to the new girl's table in the cafeteria at lunchtime, people looked up and noticed. Later, when one of the others asked, "What you doin' actin' so nice to that weird new girl?" she responded, "It just seemed like the right thing for me to do." "Why?" persisted the other girl. "I'm, I'm trying to be a Christian," she said in reply. (William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, May 1999, p. 25)

Soon, we will come, at our Lord's invitation, to sup with him at Table. When we commune with our risen Lord Jesus, who glorifies the Father, we enter into the very presence of God and we are blessed. Soon after, we will go out into the world to be the means by which God is present in the world, and through whom God seeks to love and reclaim the world. May we take very seriously are calling to be Christians, little Christs, who reflect the light and love and presence of God to others. When we live authentic, Christ-like lives, we do our part to help fulfill Jesus' prayer to God the Father that "they may be one, as we are one" – and we give glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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