

Jesus anticipated his return to the Father, his reunion with God. He anticipated having to say goodbye to his beloved disciples. He prepared himself and the disciples as much as he could, and then the time comes for him to actually leave. As he anticipates and prepares, he prays. Jesus turns to prayer as a way to say goodbye, and we get to see and hear this prayer in this scripture passage. Jesus sends the disciples on their way to serve with this prayer. **[Read John 17:1-11]**

Goodbyes are painful. Separations are excruciating and lonely and hard. The longing we feel puts a permanent ache in our hearts. Jesus knew that, and tried to prepare his disciples for his departure. I like to think that he also experienced these same human feelings. Perhaps that's why he took so long to prepare. His Farewell Discourse goes on for three chapters in John. He was preparing the disciples, but perhaps he was also preparing himself. He loved them and knew it would be some time before he would be reunited with them. He prepared them to carry on without him, by giving them the important task of carrying on his work. Jesus completed the work that he was given to do, but it was time for the disciples to complete the work they were given to do.

Even though Jesus completed his work, that doesn't make leaving any easier. His sense of accomplishment didn't make it easier to say goodbye. What did help was prayer. Jesus reaching out to God in prayer reminds us that we too have someone available to help us in our times of goodbye and separation. Someone who understands

what it means and how it feels to say goodbye.

What I find interesting in Jesus' prayer is that he doesn't pray to avoid the departure. He doesn't ask to stay with his beloveds. He doesn't pray to escape the separation because he knows there is no separation – between us and God. Jesus may be withdrawing from the physical world, but the Spirit engulfs it. Jesus' living presence, the living Spirit, "is freely and infinitely available to every human being everywhere through all time."¹ Instead, Jesus prays on their behalf to receive eternal life, for their protection, and for unity – to be one with God and with each other.

Jesus' parting gift, this prayer, gives the disciples everything they need to accomplish their work. First, he prays that they receive eternal life, and then takes a moment to define what he means by eternal life: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (v.3). Eternal life is not just going to heaven after we die. Eternal life is knowing God. Knowing God is being fully aware of who God is. When we know someone, we recognize them when we see them. We know them by name. We know their personality traits, their personal values, the things they hold dear, the things they strive to become.

Knowing God in this same way gives us eternal life because we know in our hearts who God is. We no longer question who God is; we know. We know because we have experienced God's love. We've felt it. We recognize God in the God moments. We have experienced God personally within our being, and just know that God gives us freedom to live and to love. God gives us a

¹ Trevor Hudson, *Pauses for Pentecost*, 91.

purpose and work to do, and we are eager to accomplish it. That is the kind of eternal life that will go with the disciples as they rise up to serve.

Jesus also prays for their protection: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (v.11). Right after this verse, Jesus says that he protected them and guarded them while he was on earth, but now he asks God to protect them. Jesus knows firsthand the trials they will face as they carry out his work. He knows that others will try to prevent them from accomplishing their work. Division and separation would continue to be their biggest obstacles.

Despite the world’s and even Christianity’s divisions, Jesus prays that unity be the foundation of their work. This unity is modeled from the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intermingled and interdependent on one another, yet they allow for difference. They are one, yet they each have different work. One is not better than the other, and they work together to accomplish one task: to be One with us.

And so, Jesus prays that we become one with God and with each other in the way the trinity is one. We should not be identical in thought and actions, but we should make room for others “gifts, experiences, and insights”² as we work together to carry out the work God gives us to do. Jesus emphasizes this unity when he prays that we become one, as they are one (v.11). Further in the chapter in verse twenty-three, Jesus says: “I in them and you in me, that they

may become completely one.” Is there a part of you that is divided? A part that holds out from being all in? A part that holds you back from doing the work God gives you to do? Have you created a division with someone that you have put off reconciling? Now is the time to become one.

As Christ leaves humanity, he prays on humanity's behalf. He was one of us, and he is still one with us. He entered into relationship and made a covenant with us. He grew to love us even when we are drenched in our humanity. Perhaps a part of him was sad to leave the physical world, but he knew it would be better for us. He is leaving room for the Holy Spirit, to come and live within us, not just among us. Leaving is hard to do, but Jesus knew that nothing could ever separate us from God.

This scripture is Jesus’ prayer for all of us. Jesus prays on our behalf for Oneness -- That we know God and become one with God and each other. Because when we are one, we can accomplish anything. We all have work to do, and it is time for us to rise up and serve. Jesus sends us on our way with prayer.

Triune God, holy trinity, we were created with the purpose of becoming one with you. Our infinite longings remind us that we are made for the Infinite. We were divinely designed for divine connection. Because this is how we have been wired, the only thing that ultimately will bring us joy and happiness is to be one with you. We know that deep within us there is a hole that only your living Spirit can fill.³ There is a part of us that prevents us from being one with you:

² *Feasting on the Word.*

³ Portions paraphrased from Trevor Hudson, *Beyond Loneliness: The Gift of God's Friendship* (Upper Room Books, 2016).

A Living Spirit
John 17:1-11
Rev. Kristie Grimaud
May 24, 2020

Ego, arrogance, selfishness, the harm we
cause others with hurtful words and actions.
Forgive us of our divisions, and bring us
back into oneness with you. Be with us as
we set out to accomplish the work you have
given us to do. Even if that means having to
say goodbye to those we love, guide our
paths until we are again one with you.
Amen.