

3.12.23 Sermon

Jesus's Last Prayer: Relationship | John 17

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Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta

So I wanted to preach this morning first because as I was thinking about how this plays out and why we come together on a Sunday morning, why we come together on Tuesday nights for prayer, why we do things like have worship and prophetic prayer nights like we will next Friday, where we all gather together and just kind of circle the throne together. And, you know, I think about why we do that. And I'm not sure that we even understand why we do that. And even as I was preparing the sermon, I was having like these epiphanies that I'm going, "Whoa, well, I think a lot different now than I did before."

So we're in the Gospel of John Chapter 17, and we only have a few more chapters to go. It's only taken us a decade. And I'm really proud of us, because we're getting through it. Here we go. We're in John 17 and this is the longest prayer that Jesus has, and that we read about. Now, he may have had more that weren't written down, but this is the longest recorded one that he has. I think prayer is one of the most intimate things that comes out of our mouth. Because it speaks what is in our heart. And so often, it is speaking of our joy, of our hurt, of our pain, of our concerns, of our hopes of our dreams, of our fears, of our questions. You know, sometimes it's just simply helps.

Sometimes it's so eloquent, that we think we are amazing by how these words came out of our mouth, and how phenomenal they were, and we're like giving ourselves a high five in our own mind. And then sometimes it's just "Hey, God, W-T-F?". And it's just what is going on? Regardless of how it comes out, or when it comes out, it is our most intimate cry of our heart to God. And it's coming from what is stirring within our heart. It's coming from what is burning inside our hearts.

So here we are with Jesus. He is days away from being crucified. He is days away from 40 lashes. He is days away from a crown of thorns put on his head. He is days away from one of the most difficult and worst days of his life. And he knows it. And we are brought into his prayer. We are brought into this intimate moment and cry of his heart. We heard his prayer at the tomb of Lazarus and you know, he said to God, "this is for

them who's hearing." We heard his prayer in the garden, but we only heard a small part. But here we are at this public moment. And he's praying.

And when I look at his prayer, not only do I look at what is prayed, but I'm looking at what he's leaving out. It's so interesting to me what is left out of this prayer. He's not praying about physical comfort. He's not praying that everything goes well for us in our lives. He's not praying for prosperity. He's not praying that we would all walk in Divine health. He's not praying that the pursuit of happiness is our end game. He's not praying that we would have high intelligence and be really smart. He's not praying for education. He doesn't pray that we memorize the Bible. And don't shut me down, but he doesn't even pray for missions. What he prays for is, to me, what is the deeper, more profound and deeply needed thing and what I believe is the core of our life. **He prays for relationship.** He prays for that beautiful perichoresis - the divine dance between We God and humanity - God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, he prays for that.

He prays for unity. He prays for glory. And that glory there, no matter how many times it said in John 17, it means "to positively acknowledge and recognize and esteem one's character, nature or attributes." He talks about us being glorified. He talks about God being glorified, he talks about God glorifying Him. And in this beautiful dance, it means to positively acknowledge and recognize and esteem one's character, nature or attributes. He's asking that we all glorify, and he's asked that we all glorify one another, as well.

Augustine of Hippo, I think sums it up so beautifully. He says, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in you." Our heart is restless until it rests in you. So what he does pray for - he prays that God, and I'm not reading the text this morning, because it's so long, but I'm just going to give you a synopsis. What he does pray for is that God would glorify Him, and that he would glorify God, that they would positively acknowledge one another relationship, to give eternal life. And he says, "What is eternal life" and verse two, "that they know God and know Jesus." Relationship. Eternal Life. Our interpretation of eternal life was that we would get to heaven. His interpretation of eternal life is that we would experience it right here on Earth, in relationship with one another.

And that "know" their means *to know or have knowledge about someone or something, through observation, or the senses, to experientially experience God.* He goes on and he prays that he would bring glory to God again. How? By finishing what God gave him to do – relationship. Not obeying what God gave Him to do less to be punished, but because of relationship with God. He wants to do what God has invited him to do, and to complete that work. He basically is saying to God, "Lord, glorify me in Your presence with the glory that you had, that I had before the world began, I'm coming home, God, I'm coming home to be glorified with you together in this beautiful dance relationship."

And then he says, "I've revealed to you to those who gave me and they've obeyed your word." That "obey" there, again, means *to keep watch over to guard to hold to preserve, they have kept watch over your word.* And that word there, that Greek is the content of

communication, "they have watched over the words that I have spoken to them." And then he goes on and says, "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine." Relationship.

And then he says, "protect them, so that they may be one as we are one." Interestingly enough, we pray for protection so that we don't get hurt. But God, Jesus here, is praying for protection, so that they may be one as we are one in relationship. And then he says, I'm speaking this out now so that they would have full measure of my joy within them. The gift of that joy, that He gives us relationship, that they're not of this world anymore than I am of this world. "And as you've sent me into the world, I'm sending them out into the world what so that they can tell people about the relationship that we have. I sanctify them for myself so that they too may be sanctified relationship."

In everything in here that I'm seeing. It is this mutuality, of giving over one to another. It's such a beautiful gift. It is such a beautiful gift that we have been given. So beautiful. Makes me want to cry all the time. To hear that dance of pouring God's own self out. We have been cheated because we have thought that God poured God's self out for us so that we could try to not sin. So that we could be good. So that we could enter this box of trying to do everything right. And the truth is, is that God poured God's own self out for us so They could love us. And so that we could love Them. And so that we could love one another. That's the beautiful relationship that we are so invited into.

So now he moves on from praying for His disciples to praying for us. And he says, "Father, just as you are in Me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, because I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be as one as we are one." Do you hear the oneness? I in them, you and me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. "And then the world will know that you sent me and have loved me even as You have loved me. And you have loved them, even as You have loved Me."

Father, I want those you have given to me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory that you've given me because you loved me before the creation of the world righteous father, though the world doesn't know you, I know you and they know that you've sent me and 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.

Do you hear relationship? Do you hear this beautiful perichoretic dance? Do you hear the baby crying in the back? It's okay. What this speaks to me is that our relationship with God is most important. What this speaks to me is God's relationship with us, is most important. What this speaks to me is that God's relationship with Christ is most important. What this speaks to me is Christ's relationship with God is most important. What this speaks to me is Christ's relationship with us, is most important. What this speaks to me is that our relationship with Christ is most important. Are you getting my drift? That the Holy Spirit's role in this is most important. And what this speaks to me is that our relationship with one another is most important. To love one another, is most important.

And that's really where I want to spend the rest of my time is on our relationship with one another. And what that looks like, in why we come together on a Sunday morning, why we come together in prayer meetings, why we come together in different Bible studies, why we come together at all? Why is the church here? I have this working thesis that we have had the church upside down and inside out for centuries. And that it wasn't necessarily supposed to be the way that we have been living it. And we've done the best that we could with the knowledge that we had and the tools that we had at the time that we did it. But I think that there's a new era that God wants to usher in where the church looks different.

And I think about what do we do in this room. Why do we come? Why are we here on Sunday? Like what are we doing? And I think about why we gather at all and today I'm specifically talking about when we gather together so I'm not building a thesis for the universe. I'm building a thesis for why we gather together. This is what is on my mind and in walking together and doing church together. What is the purpose of coming? What is the relationship that we're supposed to engage in on a Sunday morning? On a Tuesday night? I say Tuesday night because that's the day of the week have our prayer meeting.

And I think we've come into the church for centuries, week after week for worship to take place. And it's been in the system where the congregation comes in, they sit like y'all are sitting here. And then the expert gets up and has their sermon. And then the worship team gets up and they perform. And people watch, and they assess whether they like it or don't like it, are going to listen, aren't going to listen, appreciate, don't appreciate. Notice what the preacher is or isn't doing. And so we've created this community, of judgment. And then sometimes what has happened in churches - and we have all been in those churches - and maybe it's happened in this room too, where judgment of one another happens as well. And so we've built this system where we have become each other's critique, each other's judger, and each other's assessor. And we've built this system, where there's a group of people that do the work. And by work, I mean, on Sunday morning, come up, do the sermon, do whatever. And everybody watches and listens. And we decide if we're going to agree or not.

And it doesn't matter if it's this church, if it's a liturgical church, a charismatic one, I don't care what denomination it is. Everybody bring up every church you have ever been in in your entire life or seen on TV or whatever? And what does it look like? Like this. Right? This is what we've done. There are experts and there are learners. So we've built a system of performance. We've built a system of people who get up and preach and when you walk away you go "Did I do a good job? How good was I? Did I say the profound right thing." And then people come up and they go, "you did a good job, pastor," and then you go, I feel good. And then if nobody comes up and tells you, you go home, and you go, "God, I suck." For real. This is the reality of it. This is how it is.

And then as a worship leader, you get up there, and if everybody's up there going, yeah, yeah, yeah. Then it's like, yeah, I'm doing great, right. And then, if nobody does anything, you go home and you go, nobody recognized what I did. We've built a system of performance. We build a system where I have to - we all have to perform. And there

are sometime I will think in my head that it feels like a dog and pony show. It feels like you have to perform. And it's interesting, because on our last podcast that we did with Sophia and Brian, I said that sometimes it feels like that. Welcome to Tracy's world. You know, I said, "sometimes it feels like Tony likes church better than I do." Right? Tony is my husband for anybody who doesn't know. And I said, I think the reason is because for him, he can come in, and he enjoys it, and he visits with people and, and does things. And for me, I feel like I have to perform sometimes. I feel like I gotta make the sermon just right, or I got to make the room just right, or I got to match it. And because we've produced a consumer church, what happens is people come in and go "this church I like, and I don't like this church, I'm gonna go to that church."

And so as a pastor, part of this part of the pressure is how many people are sitting in your room. Because if a lot of people aren't here, it's another indication, PS, by the way, that you stink. Because we built a system in the church of performance.

Except things began to change for me in the way that I began to view church. And as I got here I realized, "wow, something has really changed." I believe that we are to build a community of mutuality within this room. And when I look at the way that we have been moving in this church, it is not pastor central anymore. It's much more about the leadership and the community and trying to build the community out into recognizing it's all of us in this space.

That's the beauty of call of us coming together. It's that we all come in ready for the service, not so that we can have a performance kind of a service, but so that we can love and minister, one to another. That's the invitation when we come on a Sunday - is that we all come in ready. And we come in listening, and alert, and going, who needs my words and my voice today? And who needs me to enter in today? And who do I need to hear for in worship? And what are you inviting me in to do today God that I can step in and minister and help others?

And I think that if churches were built like that all of the sexual scandals that hit the church would not have happened. Because the people who are doing that have been built in a system that says you, as the lead, have the right to exploit others for your own benefit. Compared to coming in and going, No, we are all a servant and mutual of one another and no one is better than anybody else. But that we're all the same. And we're all called to come in and minister one to another.

So believe in that perichoretic mutual glorifying dance of respect and love that flows back and forth. So how do we do that? How do we do it? At least try to do it different? How do we build this relationship and this unity in this oneness and this glorifying one another and making God known to one another, in order that the love that is in us flows to everybody else? Not only in this room, but outside of this room? How do we do that?

I've spent 35 years, because I came to know Christ when I was like 18. And I think about the amount of times I've walked into the church and somebody has come up and said a word. Maybe said a prayer, maybe just saw me, maybe came around me when

we have hit difficult times in our lives. Maybe worship was exactly what I needed to connect with God again. Maybe the sermon, spoke deep into my heart and changed the way I was thinking that day. And I think that is church at its best - when we come in listening, and we come in alert. And so when we do those things in the church here, there's been a shift in my head. When we come in for corporate worship, you know, why do we call altar calls, we invite people to the altar, to give us an opportunity to connect with God, but also to give us an opportunity to come and pray over those who are at the altar. And I think of how many times that that altar? How many times have you been to the altar where God has just pierced your heart, and something has shifted? Raise your hand with me. Right? It's so beautiful and profound.

You know, it's not calling an altar call so that you can count the number of people that are up there. It's an altar call, because it's a means to go how do we support you? Why do we come together that first Tuesday of the month to pray? It's so that we can gather and fellowship around I'm going to label "the throne", but really fellowship together around Christ purposefully, around worship with one another so that we can walk with one another, help one another. Breathe with one another. That's what church is about.

Or why do we preach? We preach so that we cannot pontificate and not express the depth of our own intellectual ability to string words together. And you know, that's not how I preach. It is to come in and to build relationships with each other and to encourage you to build your relationship with God. That's why we're called to come together like this. This is why we do what we do. Why do we worship? We don't worship so we can clap our hands and listen to the worship leaders do a beautiful job. We worship so that we can engage again, around the throne, around Jesus with one another and with the worship team. So it's not so much the worship team is up here doing their thing. It's that we gather with them together and that they lead us into a space together.

And you often hear us talk about the prophetic. Sophia taught a class on the prophetic and we use that term "prophetic" and I think people sometimes come in and go "what is prophetic?" because we use it all the time. It's like the lingo term that we use, but really what it means is to be able to come up to somebody, and in a word, in a prayer in, in a moment, I'm going to put it like this - you read their mail, right? You speak something of truth that somebody goes, I have breath, or the prophetic when you're out there in the store, you're out there doing things and there's a niggles and you look at somebody and you feel something, and you dare to walk up to them and say something and you see them go," have you read my mail?"

It's like breathing Christ into the world. And I think there have been in the church people who have operated in the prophetic and they made it about them. It's not about us. It's not about us. It's not about how good or bad I am. It is about feeding into one another. And if it happens to be in that moment, that I'm in the prophetic so that I can feed into you, so be it - that's the beauty of the body. The body is supposed to nurture and minister one to another, whether you carry the role or title of a pastor, or whatever that is, our journey is to minister and love on one another. That's why the prophetic is there.

That's why the edification and encouragement of the body is there. It's all of us, for all of us journey together.

So the reason that I wanted to preach first is because I want us this morning, even if we're tired, from daylight savings, that I wish would go away, that we would be alert. And that we would journey with being one as God has invited us to be one and we would journey in that perichoretic dance of us in Christ, Christ in us, us in God, God in us, us in one another. And that we would enter into worship together this morning, listening for one another. When we say that "we believe God moves through planned portions of the service, as well as through unplanned portions of the service, and if you feel like you have a word or something from God, we invite you to come up and we'll discover together with through the elders, whether or not that's for the whole body." You know, we do that, so that there's a deeper invitation for us to engage in the body to be able to come up and go, I'm hearing this could this be for the whole body or not? We do that because we so believe in the community of believers.

But I think oftentimes what happens is we're afraid to do that. You know, we're afraid to get out of our seat, walk up, talk to the elders, people do look at you, they will they do it. One turns their head for a second, but then they've turned back, you know. But we do that because we so believe in that in that community hearing together. And you don't know this, but this is how we do our elder meetings. It is not me dictating – it's me bringing the vision in or what I'm hearing from God, but it's the elders adding voices. Or if you ever came out and you watched us pray early in the morning before Sunday service, you would hear we bounce off of one another constantly. To me, it is the most beautiful and healthiest way that the body can be.

And those voices that I love so much, they include yours, too, we need your voice. We need to hear from one another because you carry things that we all need. Every one of us carry something that every one of us needs. That's John 17. We need one another. We're called to glorify one another. We're called to walk in unity with one another. We're called to love one another. So much so that this was the final prayer, the most important prayer that was recorded that he says, more than anything else. I want relationship and the love, that they would know this, that this is eternal life. This eternal life is deeply loving one another. And deeply loving God, and letting God deeply love us. That's eternal. So as we go into worship this morning, can we listen together? And can we take chances? Do you know how many times I've gone up to somebody and gone I feel like this is stirring. This is what I'm hearing bla bla bla bla, how accurate is that? If not, okay. It's okay. It's okay. If we try to pray over somebody and fumble over our words. It's okay. If we, you know, we get up and we say something and it's not right. It's okay. We're going to make mistakes. It's okay. But can we try? Can we at least try. And I'm going to invite Dana to come up.

Dana Boyes

At our staff meeting Wednesday morning, I was sharing about my experience from Tuesday night prayer the night before. I was sharing that it was just so sweet and so powerful. And over the last month and a half, I've been going through old journals of

mine. And one of the things that stood out to me as I'm reading through these journals was that probably about 90 to 95% of the major transformative moments of my faith in my life were at a Tuesday night prayer or at a Sunday morning service here, right up here at the altar.

And it was because of two things. One, is exactly what you said, Pasto Tracy, the invitation to come and be open to receive what God has for us and two, to be willing to risk. Risk have people look at you walking up front, it's the risk of getting out of our own way to allow God to use us with that prayer for somebody, with a word for somebody where you're just thinking, like, I don't even know if this is going to make any sense. But it does. And so much of my faith journey of somebody saying a word or praying over me, propelled me into that next transformation of my faith of my heart, of my marriage, my relationships, that has brought me to where I am today. And wasn't all flowers and rainbows. It was a journey through storms. But I was able to make it though those moments because there was a space created where I could come in and receive and risk. And so I think ties in with exactly what Pastor Tracy is saying and that's the invitation is just to allow our hearts to just be open for that.

Rev. Sophia Foutres

I used to work at a drug and alcohol recovery center, and I lead spiritual groups there. And while I was there, I had the opportunity to practice especially listening for other people and asking God, what are you saying to this person who's who, at that time were at rock bottom. And a lot of them, shunned by the church, didn't know where they belonged and God anymore. And I can remember, for a season of my life, the way that I was hearing, the way that I was hearing God for other people was, I was getting a glimpse into their childhood, in a very distinct picture. And so I remember this with this one guy. I was praying for him, and a vision just kind of dropped in my spirit. And it was him playing baseball when he was like a teenager. And I was like, Okay, I don't know what this means, but I'm going to just try and ask him. And I said to him, "I'm seeing you playing baseball, as a as a teenage guy, and I'm seeing you getting injured." And he just starts crying. And I'm like, Okay, well, maybe this means something to you. What does it mean to you, and he said, "that's the first time that the doctor ever gave me pain meds, that started my addiction. And from that point, my life has not been the same. And that moment basically ruined my life."

And so what I felt was God, revealing to me, you know, in this is, you know, we do our best with interpretation. It's not 100%, we just know and see in part, and we offer it from a place of encouragement. And so what I said to that to them was, "I really feel like God wants to restore that moment in you, where you kind of just got tossed and lost, something was stolen from you. In that moment, I feel like God saw you and wants to restore that moment, and, and set you free, and break this cycle of addiction that started there." And the guy just wept and wept and got to pray for him. And of course, I don't, I don't know where he is now, but I hope that it was that moment - When you see something, and you take the risk, and the person realizes that Oh, my God, literally, there is a divine presence out there that actually saw me in that moment and cares about me. And that can change everything. Wow, God, you see me, and you care about

me and you want me well, and you want me to be free. So just one moment to share with you I've had so many of those moments, to be the receiver of and the giver of and it's so powerful. It's so scary, but it's so worth it to take the risk. And like Pastor Tracy said, if it's off, then it's like, oh, okay, well, it must have been what I ate or something.

Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta

I wanted both of them to share. But you know, what Sophia said is, so often we will be talking with somebody or doing something and you'll have a flash of an image, but we just ignore instead of going, you know, this just came up. I just want to submit this to you. And how that can change everything. Even if you look over at somebody and you have a little nudge. And you just walk over to them - so many times I've had just a nudge somebody was on my heart- just walk over and begin a conversation or walk over and pray. And God steps in - the beautiful thing is that God wants to minister to us and God, most often, not all the time, but many times uses each of us. And so it's so important that we're alert so that we can be that vessel that God uses in those moments.

And, and I just want to land here. You know, when I talk about this, I often cry. The reason that I cry is because I have the gift of being able to feel the depth of God's love for each one in this room and in the world. And so I cry because I feel God's love. And I cry because so often we don't. That there are those that I can look at and I see it's not hitting - that we don't know. And I feel like it's this grief that God carries of God - again, it's this final prayer of Jesus. And I don't think he was going Father, I pray that they would be one as we that one, you know. You know, I think he was going to that they would know the depth of what we have that they would know that eternal life is knowing you and being known by you. That's how I think he was praying. So can we stand together? Can we enter into worship together? And can we love on one another and glorify one another and build unity among ourselves as we enter into worship this morning.