

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Prayer for Calling of Discipleship

Scripture: John 17:6-19

Date: May 16th, 2021 Ascension Sunday

“Wisdom of the Gospel of John: A Prayer for Humanity”

“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. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ This 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. ¹⁰ Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I’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. ¹² When I was with them, I watched over them in your name, the name you gave to me, and I kept them safe. None of them were lost, except the one who was destined for destruction, so that scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³ Now I’m coming to you and I say these things while I’m in the world so that they can share completely in my joy. ¹⁴ I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. ¹⁵ I’m not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. ¹⁷ Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth” (CEB).

At first glance, this excerpt of scripture has several lessons to glean from it, but this piece of scripture is Jesus’ final words in the Gospel of John before his arrest and eventual death at the hands of the Roman Empire. You could say this is Jesus’ farewell address or this is comparable to the other Gospels, Prayer of Gethsemane, but this prayer has a different tone and theme than the other gospels. A few lessons to glean is the image of God is in us and is revealed through the word and teachings of the gospel, which Jesus has preached and fulfilled during his ministry. It teaches Jesus’ prayer is not a prayer to teach the disciples on how to effectively pray, nor is it a prayer specific to a situation, but this is a prayer for humanity for us to not just embody the gospel and

teachings but for us to be made whole through the gospel. This prayer teaches us our wholeness and the healing power of the gospel message transforms us as the gospel instructs us to see the joys of the world. Lastly, this passage shows us Jesus' altruism and his compassion for God's creation. This prayer is a calling of discipleship and blessing from Jesus himself for us to carry out the gospel message as we build the kingdom of God here on Earth.

In verse six, Jesus uses the word, "reveal," to describe the Word of God. This reminds us of the opening passages of John, "¹*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* ²*The Word was with God in the beginning.* ³*Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being* ⁴*through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people'* (Gospel of John 1:1-4 CEB). The revelation of the gospel is a transformation of the heart, mind, body, and spirit. The image of God is within us as it always has been, but through Jesus' proclamation of truth to power, the Spirit of God is awakened in us to proclaim the gospel message just as boldly and passionately as Jesus did in order to transform this world into its fullest potential. Jesus encourages us to fully embrace the values of the gospel message and empowers us to do the work necessary to make this transformation in a world plagued with so many issues and calamities.

Jesus begins this prayer with praying for his disciples and praises them for their faith, action, and confidence in their proclamation of the message of the gospel. Jesus shows trust in the disciples to listen to the Holy Spirit and one another as they continue the work of the gospel following his ascension. Jesus says this, "²⁰*I'm not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word.* ²¹*I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.* ²²*I've given them the glory that you gave me so that they can be one just as we are one.* ²³*I'm in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me.*²⁴*Father, I want those you gave me to be with me where I am. Then they can see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* ²⁵*Righteous Father, even the world didn't know you, but I've known you, and these believers know that you sent me.* ²⁶*I've made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them"* (John 17:20-26 CEB).

Jesus empowers us to return to our roots, the image of God, and to listen to the message of the Wind (the Holy Spirit). When we faithfully respond to the summons of the gospel, we will be in the presence of the mighty, rushing spirit present at the beginning

of creation as it pushes us to the foundations of our faith, which are living the fruits of the gospel, love, hope, peace, and joy.

In fact, joy is the exact word Jesus uses in verse thirteen. What is joy? According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, Joy is, *“the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires”* What is joy according to this passage? Joy is knowing the work of the gospel is about co-creating the kingdom of God for all life, but what does that mean? It means we find joy in knowing our neighbor’s needs are taken care of as they raise a family; joy in the kingdom of God is taking joy that we are making the world a better place through our acts and deeds of kindness, compassion, and justice; joy in the kingdom of God is knowing the world can be a difficult, troubling place, but through the love and support of our community, our joy is celebrated by serving each other through our love, support, grace, and care.

This passage and its reflection on joy reminded me of a song from one of my favorite bands called, *The Collection*. Their song, *“Left of Your Joy,”* verse three begins with asking a series of questions I imagine were racing through Jesus’ head during this prayer and certainly race through my mind as I attempt to do my part in the kingdom of God. The third verse, bridge, and chorus say this, *“What if the valley’s too wide to hold your dreams? What if your heart has grown too dull to gleam? What if it’s ancestral, it’s running through your genes? It’s all too much now you’re bursting at the seams. Your sorrow does not flatter you, even if its tears are true. I’ve seen you sing your way through deeper blues. Sacred songs and holy water, they don’t last long enough to bother so all the things you miss just wash from the surface. But there’s still light in your eyes. It’s faint but it still shines. There is nothing in the past that you belong to and even if the memories come and find you. Well, it’s not the task to try to rescue what’s left, what’s left of your joy”* (Song: *“Left of Your Joy; The Collection*). God is with us in our joy and delivers us through all the pain and sorrow that leads us to our joy.

This is the final Sunday of our Easter season. It seems somewhat odd to talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus and now go back to his final words, but we are reminded of this prayer today because of the altruism Jesus exudes in this moment of vulnerability and questioning. This is an inner monologue of Jesus. He is not alone in the garden or secluded in the desert, but Jesus is surrounded by all of his friends in this moment. Jesus is in the presence of those who have fought and journeyed with him in their pursuit of justice. Jesus wants all of God’s creation to take joy in their lives, and Jesus shows us in one final lesson that this is possible

through the gospel as long as we, through our discipleship in Christ, spread the love of the gospel to all those we encounter.

Discipleship takes discipline and a willingness to serve our communities' needs as opposed to only our individual needs. Covid-19 has forced us to think about one another instead of just us as individuals. As we, the Easter people of God, rise from the ashes of Covid and return back to familiar places, routines, and people, may we find joy in building the kingdom of God and equally find joy in seeing the joy other people's eyes and faces as we spread the love of the gospel in their lives.

If this is Jesus' prayer for humanity, then what is our prayer for humanity? Do we think of all of those dying in India from Covid; do we think of the Palestinian as the Israeli government rounds them up and commits violence against them? Do we think of the people the American empire has left out in its pursuit of greed for profit and power? Who are we bringing joy to and how will we bring it? This brings so many questions to light, but as our Easter season comes to an end and Pentecost begins, where is the wind of the Spirit sending us?

Is our mission of discipleship rooted in restorative justice and action or in conforming unity to our own self-interests? Is our discipleship rooted in love for our neighbor or rooted in desire for others to see us do good work and be acknowledged? Is our discipleship rooted in our local communities or is it only attempting to make broad brush stroke changes only placing a band-aid on the issues we face?

Our Pentecost season lasts from May 24th until Nov 28th when Advent begins. Let our mission and our discipleship in Dawson and Wibaux counties bear the fruits of the gospel for each of our communities' vitality and strength. Let us take our time of rest and relaxation this summer and come back refreshed and renewed in the fall to begin a new year of discipleship and love for the gospel. May we nurture our communities and prune the unnecessary, irrelevant practices out of our being to bring about healthy, vibrant communities to become their fullest selves through healing and reconciliation with one another, and when we are unable to do so, may we find strength and joy in the encouraging words of Jesus as he knew we were fully capable of answering the summons of the Gospel. May the rushing current of the Yellowstone River move us out of apathy and may the winds of Makoshika send us to where God needs us to be! Let us rise Easter people in the grace and justice of Christ, Amen.