

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A  
May 24, 2020  
St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church  
John 17:1-11  
Sarah Chancellor-Watson

“He Lives In You”

Prayer is one of the most meaningful and important things that we do as a community of faith and as individual believers. It's not because the words we say out loud, in our hearts, in song, together, or alone, are somehow magic words that get us the things that we want. The power of prayer has always been rooted in relationship. When we pray it's an act that strengthens the relationship we have with God and with one another. Praying for and with one another is among the most sacred and holy acts that we participate in as a church. When was the last time you were aware of someone praying for you? What has your experience been of another person praying for or with you? I know that my own life has been punctuated by such powerful spiritual experiences of encouragement, peace, comfort, and purpose as others have prayed for and over me and my life. I've been lifted up in prayer at my baptism and confirmation, before leaving for college, before a mission trip, before, during, and after surgeries and during times of great pain and loss, at many points along my four year long journey of becoming an ordained minister, and even right here on the steps of our sanctuary as I was installed to be your pastor. These moments represent for me encounters with the Divine. Moments in time where I particularly felt the Spirit's stirrings, in the weight of hands on shoulders, the same hands who have supported me at many different points along my life's journey.

In today's scripture reading we get to overhear Christ in an intimate moment with the God he calls Father as he is praying for his disciples. At this point in John's gospel Jesus knows his next steps will lead him to the cross, and so his prayer is one of blessing for the disciples as he asks that they will be one with God and one with each other. This prayer is good news for us today, as we've spent the last couple of months adjusting our lives in so many ways, and are missing and lamenting the usual ways that we connect to God and to one another. I personally am someone who feels God's presence most often in the company of others, whether that's in worship, in small group Bible Studies, participating in a mission project, or heck even

sometimes in the tedium of a committee meeting. Perhaps I am not the only one who lately has felt distant from God as I have had to put in extra effort in forging new pathways of connection between myself and God and with others.

John's gospel from his opening lines emphasizes this unity and connection between Christ and God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As the gospel story unfolds in Jesus' teachings and healings, we see how God is revealing God's very self in the person and humanity of Jesus Christ, breaking down the barriers between the Divine and humanity. Jesus' prayer is that this unity he knows and experiences with God may be extended to his followers. He prays that "they know you, the only true God." This "knowing" isn't some kind of cognitive knowledge, some kind of rote statement of belief, but it is a living and dynamic relationship.

Jesus prayer for unity also speaks to the challenges that the disciples will face in continuing the mission set forth by Christ, without his physical presence among them. This prayer is the culmination of what is known as the "farewell discourse." Liturgically this passage provides for us a nice bridge between celebrating the Ascension of Christ – for those of you who aren't familiar with the ascension, it's basically the day that Jesus started working from home – and the celebration of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. Jesus knew that they would need each other, that alone they would not be able to do what he was asking of them. Jesus' prayer is a reminder that the distinctions, categories, and loyalties of race, gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. are not what ultimately unite us, but instead what binds us together it is our love and knowledge of the Lord.

The disciples were facing a daunting dilemma. How do they continue this new way of life? This mission that Jesus charges them to continue on without their leader and teacher? It all reminds me of a scene in the Disney movie – The Lion King. Full disclosure I may be hitting the Disney Plus a little hard these days seeking comfort in the classic movies of my childhood. In this Disney version of Shakespeare's Hamlet, the would-be King, the true heir to the throne, Simba, has spent the better part of his adolescence and young adulthood running away from the trauma of his past – the death of his father. But of course, his past catches up to him and he is torn between what he knows is right and the urge to again run away from his pain and loss

and responsibilities. Simba encounters the wise old baboon, Rafiki who claims that he knows where Simba's father is. Simba tries to correct him as Rafiki leads him to a pool of water where he commands Simba to look into reflective surface. Let down, Simba complains, "that's just my reflection." To which Rafiki urges Simba to "Look harder." As he does Simba begins to recognize his father in his own reflection. Rafiki explains, "You see? He lives in you."

Jesus prayer is good news for us who feel the pain of disconnection. First of all Jesus prays for us! It's a prayer that is just as real as the prayers of those we know and have close relationship with. Sometimes we have to look harder, look a little deeper to remind ourselves that God is never far from us and the connection we experience with God is not so easily broken. At the end of this prayer, Jesus says, "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."

Jesus says that no one has seen God, but Jesus is the one who is with God and shows us God at work in the world by closing the distance between God and the world. Jesus' prayer means that we are now empowered to be the ones who can show the world what God is like. When we love one another, God lives in us. It is through our actions of grace, justice, righteousness, kindness, compassion, and peace that the world gets a glimpse of the only true God and of Jesus Christ his only Son. And to that I say, "Amen."