

"Believing Prayer"
John 17:20-26

May 8, 2016
Acts 16:16-34

New Horizons Presbyterian Church
Easter 7-C

Jesus prayed for his disciples as he bid them goodbye. [All of John 17 is Jesus' earnest prayer as prepares to face his death.] This intimate conversation with God reviews his mission on this earth. It points beyond his work to the glorification God - the ultimate achievement of God's intent for this creation. He prays for his disciples as he sends them to continue his mission in a hostile world. He prays for their unity as they encounter difficult challenges.

Jesus prayed, and continues to pray, for all who would come to believe as a result of the disciples' work. That's us – the whole church! Jesus' prayer for unity is that they (the disciples) would become one just as he and God were one. The unity for which he prayed was living relationship with God, consistency with God's will, God's intent for this world.

This prayer is a conversation with God about Jesus' hopes for the future. He knew his life on earth was ending. He had invested deeply in the development of this little band of disciples. He wanted them to know the value of intimate relationship with God. This prayer shifted the focus. Jesus understood his mission as calling people into relationship with God, relationship that would impact their relationships with others. The outcome of such relationship: revealing God's glory in the world; making God known to the world.

God's glory is about relationship with God. It is the response to the question raised by the jailer in the reading from Acts: "What must I do to be saved?"

From the earliest scriptures we are aware of God's desire to be with humankind. God seeks to be present, to be known to /with people of faith, indeed all people, from the very beginning. Salvation is not just about the future. Salvation is life with God in the present. The center of the salvation story for us is Jesus Christ, who demonstrated life with God as a human being.

The jailer was called to believe in Jesus as Lord. Belief in Jesus Christ draws us into new behaviors. The focus of our lives shifts from individual achievement to fulfillment of God's intent for us. In this relationship we are freed from the demons that distract us. We are energized to live as disciples of a living Lord. This is the life that gives glory to God. It is out of our control. We allow ourselves to be led and to experience the deep satisfaction of serving God, joining with God.

I once shared in a workshop conducted by a pastor I greatly respected.

She was seeking to help us develop spiritual practices to enrich our ministries.

At the conclusion she gave us each a word to live with, to ponder, to consider in the coming weeks and months. My word was submissive.

My first response was, "That means giving in!"

Well, yes it does. It means giving in to God --- which may mean: taking leadership, joining a coalition, or any number of actions intended to address the issues of our world.

We submit so that God's glory may be revealed to our world. Now, how do we do that?! Probably the first thing that springs to mind is the celebration of worship, especially on the high holy days of the church year - a visible witness. Second to that may be the experience of answered prayer as we lift ones we care about to God for healing or encouragement. Working together on a common project

often creates a sense of belonging and inclusion important for well-being. Still another might be the small “miracles” that touch our lives: the thoughtful gesture, the kind word, assistance offered in a critical moment. These are the things that make us holy; the things that draw us into deep relationship with God. These are outward signs of God’s presence among us.

Our worship reflects our shared or common belief. Community action takes place when people of faith come together to address the issues that impact the whole of the community. This congregation is known for its community outreach and care. It has a proud history of responding to that community. Those ministries have been strong because they have been supported by prayer of the people of God, gathered and separate. Those prayers reflect the unity of "abiding with" another, holding each other and this congregation before God for care and direction. It is a very significant experience to become aware of the power of the prayers of the people. Unity is experienced as we pray for one another and the church. God’s presence becomes known as our faith becomes visible.

Christ’s prayer for unity gives us pause. None of us wants to be just like anyone else. (It's un-American!) We want to be seen and understood as individuals. We don’t want to be lumped together in one group. Yet we believe we value the diversity that makes our world so very interesting. We understand that variety is necessary for completeness.

It is important to remember that we are not called to think alike. We are called to be faithful to God. We are called to use our gifts and talents to show God’s love and grace to our world. We are called to be present to our world --- just as Jesus was present to his world.

This begins with love for one another; genuine concern for each member of the body. This is the unity for which Christ prayed. This is the unity that amazed people as they observed the early church: “How these Christians love one another!”

You see, even in close, dynamic relationship Jesus and God remained two distinct persons. Father and Son could not, and did not need, to be the same to the world. Each has a unique relationship with us. We are enriched by variety of relationship as we live and work together as a particular people of God.

Jesus desires also to be in relationship with this congregation. We are the ones who carry his message of love and salvation into this corner of our world. We are the ones who give God’s possibilities an opportunity to change our world.

May we celebrate the unity that has sustained the life of this congregation. May we lift up one another in prayer and celebration of the uniqueness that identifies this congregation. May we [ray believing that God will lead us int the future God holds for us. Amen.