

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Reflections for Emmaus Groups at St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, Virginia

Preparing for Sunday, May 28, 2017 // Easter 7, Year A

The Gospel: John 17:1-11

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Background and general observations

Chapter 17 of John's Gospel is the conclusion of Jesus' "Farewell Discourse," and in the opening verses of this chapter, we see Jesus' focus move from addressing the disciples to addressing God. This portion of the "Farewell Discourse" is sometimes called the "High Priestly Prayer," with Jesus acting as priest and intercessor, still caring for his disciples in these remaining hours before the crucifixion, but now doing so by praying for them. It is an intimate time, and we are allowed to listen in on Jesus' prayer.

Jesus is also praying for himself. He notes that he has completed his work of "glorifying" the Father on earth, and now Jesus asks to be glorified in the Father's presence. Jesus is ready to return to the place he occupied before the creation of the world. And since he is leaving his disciples "in the world," Jesus asks the Father to keep them and protect them. Of course, he has already prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort them, so this petition is a continuation of Jesus' concern for his beloved disciples.

When Jesus says he has "glorified" the Father, he means that he has manifested the Father's presence, made the Father "known" in the world, and served as an "icon" or window to the Father; that is, those who have seen Jesus have indeed seen the Father.

Ideas for discussing the application of this lesson to our daily lives

1. "Father, the hour has come..."

One interesting observation about this phrase is its nod to "the eternal now"; in God's time, the hour is always here. Although Jesus had clearly come to the culmination of his earthly ministry, and this "hour" had special significance, Jesus is also clear in John's Gospel that eternal life is always available to us and that God is always *here* and *now*. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus speaks about the foolishness of building barns and storing up treasure for the future, reminding us to stay in the present.

How would your life change if you lived as if “the hour has come,” rather than waiting for “the hour” that is coming at some later time in your life? What do you make of the idea of “the eternal now,” as opposed to the eternal as something in the future?

Most of us have first-hand experience about the ways children can serve as teachers for us. For example, because they have a much foggier sense of time, their ideas about things like “now,” “before,” “after,” “later,” and “future” are likely much closer to the way Jesus wishes us to live. Children are almost always living in the present, in the “eternal now.”

What keeps you from living in the eternal now? When have you experienced yourself slipping into the eternal now? What do you know of letting go of anxious notions about the future and living in the present moment?

2. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Although our idea of “knowing” something is generally understood to be an intellectual or rational idea, we still have an awareness of different ways of “knowing.” There is an intuitive way of knowing, and we sometimes speak of “knowing” something in our bones; we have gut instincts that we know to trust; we “know” certain things by heart.

In the Hebrew language, the idea of knowing can be much more intimate, and “to know” someone is not simply to know facts about that person; rather, “to know” another can even have very intimate sexual connotations. But even in the English language, to really “know” someone means more than simply acquiring data about that person.

We are straining against the limits of our language and our usual way of thinking about these things, but how do you make sense of the idea that knowing God is eternal life? When have you had a sense of knowing God and being known by God in a way that was much deeper than mere thought or rationality? How would you describe this way of knowing and being known?

Some have suggested that the world honors and values intellectual and empirical knowledge much more than this other way of knowing. If that is true, then where do you find support for this spiritual or religious way of knowing?

3. “I glorified you on earth...”

A second century Christian theologian named Irenaeus famously remarked, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Ponder what Irenaeus’ statement might say about Jesus’ humanity, and about yours. When do you feel “fully alive”? What keeps you from feeling this way more often? Are you able to name your hindrances? What do you need in order to avoid feeling drained of life, or drained of “the glory of God”?

Jesus' life and ministry allowed God to be made known on earth; Jesus' life was a sign, a testimony, a window through which people were able to see and better understand the image and glory of God. When we understand that as the Father sent him, he has also sent us, we realize that the world will know God by knowing us, that we too become vessels for seeing God.

How would your life need to change if you are going to "glorify" God more fully and be a vessel by which others may know the love of God?

4. Jesus' vision of unity strikes many people as being in stark contrast to our present divisions in politics, in religion, and even in domestic life. It seems important for many of us to be "right" about important issues of the day—even in a morally ambiguous world—and this sometimes leads us to feel it is important to point out how others are wrong.

How does Jesus' vision of unity address our present divisions, our need to be right, and our occasional demonization of those who differ from us? How would your life change if you lived more completely into Jesus' vision of unity?

5. "Holy Father, protect them in your name..."

It is touching to see how Jesus prays for the protection of the disciples after he is gone. Any parent will surely recognize his or her own prayer for the protection of their children.

However, all but one of the apostles died a violent, martyr's death. Does this mean that God did not answer Jesus' prayer? Or, is Jesus praying for a different kind of protection, a protection that keeps the disciples regardless of the way in which they die?

Although many of us are accustomed to praying for our children's physical safety, is there a deeper and even more important kind of protection for which we are praying?