

"As We Are One" – John 17:1-11 – May 24, 2020

Rev. Rachel A. Wann

These past few Sundays we have been looking at the text from the Gospel of John credited to the time following the Last Supper, and prior to Jesus' arrest by the religious authorities. Because he knows his time with them is almost over, he uses this as a time to say goodbye. Traditionally this entire section has been called the "farewell discourse." Jesus takes this opportunity to go back over and summarize everything he has taught to his disciples – all those things that he wants them to remember. And he has been preparing them for the turmoil that is coming – how to live through it and how to move past it. In this final section, he prays for them, asking God, whom he calls Father, to be glorified in the finished work that Jesus came to do and then to finally unite the disciples in such a way that their unity matches the unity between God the Father and God the Son.

Now, glory is one of those concepts that I have always had trouble fully understanding. It's hard enough getting a grasp on glory as pertains to humans, how much harder when speaking of glory in relation to God. When in doubt, I like to refer to the Oxford English Dictionary. One definition of the word "glory" points to a "special cause for pride, respect, or delight," another defines glory as "a luminous ring or halo." Other words related to glory are: splendor, majesty, grandeur, wonder, delight, honor, adoration.

For humans, glory is sometimes used in reference to some past, grand accomplishment, like in the old song *Glory Days*, by musician Bruce Springsteen. Glory days refer to those times when we were young and felt that we had the world in palms of our hands. We could do anything. Then the idealism of youth turned into the ongoing daily struggle that is life. For some, glory days are the reminder of a simpler time.

Glory is also used in relation to military battles won, like "a field of glory." The field of glory is that place where soldiers become family, blood is spilled, lives are lost, but all is done willingly and courageously in the pursuit of and pride in a common ideology.

When the word glory is used with God it has that elements of majesty and honor, but also the luminescence, as when you see a painting depicting a bright or shining light in reference to the presence of God among humans or even the use of halos in paintings of Jesus or with those considered saints.

So in this passage from John's gospel, Jesus speaks of the completion of his work as an agent that bestows glory on God. The work of Jesus is something in which God may take great pride and pleasure. It points to full completion, nothing left out, the culmination of everything leading up to this fulfillment of Jesus' work. Jesus affirms that his work concludes as he has given life eternal to those who have loved and followed him, his beloved disciples. They themselves are a manifestation of Christ's own glory. We who have received Jesus and have continued his

work are also a representation of Christ's glory. Perhaps that image of Jesus taking pride in us or being honored by us helps explain our deep longing to someday hear those words from Christ himself, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." As any child longs to receive praise from a beloved parent, we humans desire to give our best, our all, to God.

In all this emphasis on glory, Jesus also prays for his disciples, specifically that they, or we, would become one, as Jesus and the Father are one. It is a prayer for unity. Jesus affirms that he taught them everything they needed, Jesus gave them his words, those same words that God the Father gave to Jesus himself. And now he prays that all the disciples would experience unity that held God and him together.

Now, in light of what we see in the world around us in these times, when divisions among people seem at an all-time high, when people argue with one another over wearing a face mask in public, this prayer for unity among humankind seems like nothing more than wishful thinking or perhaps youthful idealism. Especially when Jesus wants that unity to look like the unity that he has with God.

But when we look at it in terms of striving toward a common end goal of bringing glory to God, to work together on the same field, this earth that is our home, and to pursue what God has called us to do, and what Jesus modeled for us, it is simply this. To love God, and to love others as ourselves. Nothing else matters. That is what he said to do.

We each have our own unique ways of working toward the common good – whether it be working toward more kindness toward others, or more compassion, seeking justice for those oppressed, providing relief to the afflicted, to feeding the hungry. That is what loving our neighbor and loving God looks like.

One thing this pandemic has shown us is this – what we had before, what was considered "normal" wasn't good enough, and it certainly wasn't bringing a whole lot of glory to God. I don't want to go back to normal. This worldwide crisis has given all of us, the whole world, a do-over – a chance to start over. To redefine what normal should look like. But we are not on a level playing field. Those who have the power can make the most change. We each have our part to play in what comes next. Christ has given us his words, he has prayed and continues to pray for our unity, and we have his glory already within us. It is up to us to let it shine forth.