

John 17: 1-11, 20,21

Lion King clip used in children's time: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhEU3EF4jvM>

SERMON

When we lived in Lancaster, there was a member of our congregation, Emma, a woman in her 90's, who considered her work at that point in life to be to pray. She had retired from nursing years ago and due to a bad heart, wasn't able to do much more than care for her daily needs, read, and pray. She would sometimes come up to me, after a Sunday service, as I was trying to wrangle my kids together and collect the crayons and scraps of paper, the books lying scattered around our seats, and say, I just want you to know, I've been praying for you. It was said with such love and kindness, and sincerity. Emma prayed for me. One young mother in church, whose child struggled with mental health issues, would sometimes call Emma. We need your prayers today, she'd say. It's been a rough day, please pray for us. Yes, Emma was a pray-er.

What a gift to know that someone prays for us.

In our scripture today, Jesus teaches us something about praying. Here he prays for himself, prays for others, prays for those yet to come.

Let's look more closely at this prayer we heard this morning- Jesus asks to be glorified, which simply means to make God's presence visible. He asks to make God's presence visible so that all who know him will have eternal life.

And then Jesus goes on to tell us what eternal life is.

Throughout John's gospel, Eternal life is to know God and Jesus. What it means to "know" God is key, and to know God in the Fourth Gospel has no connection with head knowledge, or about what one thinks. Rather, knowing God means being in a relationship with God.

Jesus prays for his disciples, and for us, you and me, that we will know we are one with him, one with God and one with each other.

Eternal life is being in relationship with all of God's family.

How easily I can forget that!

Friday night, it wasn't quite time to go to bed, and so I did something I've vowed to no longer do - kind of like deciding not to open the refrigerator door one more time...

I've realized that going to the New York Times website and seeing what's new there, just before bed, is a BAD idea. I get sucked in and often stirred up. Not a good recipe for healthy sleep hygiene.

But, it happened on Friday night. I found myself reading about the leadership of our country disputing the death count attributed to COVID. The ways doubt is sowed can lead to incredible strife, mis-information and unnecessary suffering. Planting seeds of mis-trust of our medical community is not only bad for cultivating the oneness Jesus calls us to, it's dangerous business.

I was stirred up - anger turned to despair pretty quickly on the couch that night. Then I remembered this prayer of Jesus - may they have eternal life, may they know they are one as we are one. Oh Lord, how do I get there when I feel so angry and helpless?

Are we really one? What would it look like for Jesus' prayer to be fulfilled?

Imagine for a moment what it might be like if we truly saw ourselves as one with God and one with another. In relationship with Jesus and all our brothers and sisters.

Imagine us arguing a whole lot less- Living knowing we are one; living in a way that cares for every body in our midst...

Imagine yourself being a little kinder and gentler with those who hold different opinions, maybe seeing the fear or hope below our differences. We might pray for one another,

recognizing that the fear in others is deep down, not any different than mine - we all want to be happy and secure.

Imagine what it might be like to live out of a sense of deep knowing that God is a part of every moment, the good, the difficult, the ugly. Imagine that we knew, in our core, that God is here, among us. We might not struggle so hard.

Can you imagine that? That we're not in control of this mess. That God is IN us, in this mess with us?

I want to introduce you to a prayer that might help us move towards Jesus and that sense of oneness he prays for. It's called metta meditation, or the metta prayer.

Metta meditation is a form of prayer that is thousands of years old. From a Christian perspective, it's a way of glorifying God, of making God's presence known by offering a blessing of loving-kindness.

This prayer has many variations, and can be as simple as:

May you be healthy, as healthy as you can be

May you be happy

May you be peaceful

The traditional metta meditation starts with offering these blessings to ourselves, then those we feel close to, then others, including those we actively struggle to love. You simply repeat these phrases for the different persons as you call them to mind in a spirit of prayer.

I see parallels between Jesus' prayer here in John and the metta prayer. Jesus prays for himself, for those close to him, his followers, then those yet to come.

Jesus tells us this is eternal life: that they may be in relationship with you, God the creator of All, in all.

In the metta prayer the happiness we bless is an inner happiness - it has nothing to do with having what we want, but it's about connection; being in right relationship with all things - God and each other.

Can we pray for ourselves, the other followers of Christ in our midst, and those we don't agree with? Can we pray that we will all know eternal life - be in relationship?

In uncertain and divisive times like this we need spiritual disciplines to guide us.

The metta prayer is one of these disciplines. It doesn't necessarily come easily. Some struggle to offer these words of blessing to themselves, some find it difficult to offer for those they can't see even a flicker of Christ's light in. But when we practice this, offering blessings on ourselves and those we struggle to love, we may be transformed. We may see that what our so-called enemy wants and what we want are really the same. We all desire to be happy and peaceful - we all carry the Light of Christ within us. Everyone of us.

I ask you to consider this prayer discipline. To see it as one way to make God's presence a little more visible here on earth. Imagine that world where YOU are so connected with God that you know we live as one body, many members, all precious in the sight of the Lord. This prayer might help us move a little closer to that reality.

Let's take a few minutes and try this together.

3 part blessing - for ourselves, for someone we love, for someone we struggle to love.

May I/you be healthy, as healthy as you can be

May I/you be happy

May I/you be peaceful

When we feel lost, aimless in our mission, forgetting who we are—remember that we are connected to God. Remember that God lives in you. Remember that Jesus' final prayer is a model for us - a way to make God's presence known through love.

May you be as healthy as you can be

May you be happy

May you be peaceful. And may God's love shine on you and through you this day.