

Glorify Me
By Rev. Michael R. Blackwood
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John 17:1-11 CEB

¹When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. ²You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. ³This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. ⁴I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created. ⁶“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. ¹¹I’m no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I’m coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.

Have you ever had someone pray **FOR YOU?**
Have you ever prayed **FOR SOMEONE?**

I know the answer is yes, especially in these current times. With this global pandemic now having infected over half a BILLION humans world-wide and having killed over 330,000, (100,000 in the U.S.) there are lots of prayers being said FOR EVERYONE. But I want us to all think about this a little deeper today.

Every Sunday we lift up joys and concerns during worship – the Prayers of the People. We speak the names of individuals, groups, friends and family members. Prayer requests are sent to the church or pastors via email, during a conversation or via a pew card, “please pray **FOR** so-and-so... because of this—or-that...”

Outside of Sunday worship, when we gather, in person or virtually, we often take a moment to pray ... we pray to invoke the Spirit upon us and to bless and guide our thoughts, words and actions. And sometimes in those moments, we’ll offer a prayer **FOR SOMEONE**.

It feels good to know that others are praying for us. Someone cares enough about me – my well-being, my life, that they take the time to talk with God **FOR ME**. When we’re in worship or elsewhere and we hear others lift up our name, our issues, our lives, it is comforting. These people love me this much! This is relationship.

What does it feel like when you unknowingly overhear someone talking about you? You’re not really eavesdropping – maybe yes, but perhaps accidentally. It’s like the old-fashion telephone systems or “party lines.” Some of you experienced such telephone systems, but to explain to some of our younger folks, there was a time before cell phones when a house’s single and only telephone wasn’t private, but rather it was connected with other phones in other houses nearby – as if that group of telephones were extensions of one another. You would pick up your home telephone to make a call and hear your neighbor already on the phone

with someone. Most people would hang up and wait for the line to clear, but sometime people would be very quiet and listen in – eavesdrop to get a juicy bit of gossip, perhaps.

Such telephone systems are no longer in existence, but there are still opportunities to be a fly on the wall and overhear conversations. It can be both exhilarating and mischievous to be in public venues and overhear others' conversations, but imagine being a fly on the wall and you hear someone start talking **about you**?

On the internet we can find troves of stories about those hurtful moments when a person overhears someone else talking negatively about them. There are suggestions and processes for how one should deal with responding to overhearing negative comments about themselves, but I'm not talking about malicious and hurtful conversations, but rather when you overhear someone else saying POSITIVE comments about you. Oddly and unfortunately, there are lot less stories flooding the internet regarding these experiences.

Can you think of a time when you overhear someone talking about you - POSITIVELY? How does it feels when someone tells a mutual friend how wonderful you are or about something nice that you did?

*** It's entirely different situation than when you and they both know that they're saying nice things about you.

*** When it's unknowingly overheard It feels EVEN BETTER, right?

Now imagine overhearing some IN PRAYER

... and they say, "My God, I pray for _____" and you hear your name, your joy, your sorrow. With zeal, fervor and love someone is giving thanks for YOU and lifting YOU up to God. They ask God to heal you, comfort you and bless you. This is not a conversation between two people, but between someone AND GOD. How does **THAT** make you feel?

That is what we're privy to in today's Gospel reading from John. Chapter 17 in John's gospel is known as Jesus' "farewell prayer," part of the farewell discourse that is John chapters 14 through 17. There is nothing to corroborate whether this prayer was public or private, but since this prayer only appears in the gospel of John, it may be safe to say that it was a private prayer, one overheard by only John. John overheard Jesus pray for himself and for us.

For all of us prayer can be very public, but also very private and intimate. In today's reading, Jesus is nearing the end of his time on earth. He knows it and as he looks back on his life and his ministry, he stops to pray with God. We get to hear the intimacy between Jesus and God. And we're a part of it.

Overhearing someone in prayer with God allows us to catch a glimpse of THEIR relationship with God. We get to hear Jesus in relationship with God – we get to know what Jesus thinks of us and it speaks to our role in that unity ... the relationship between God, Jesus, Spirit and us. Especially since Jesus envelops us, by praying **FOR US**. This intimacy engages our experiences in a beautiful and profound way of how we existentially exist WITH God.

Jesus begins his prayer asking for glory SO AS TO glorify God. Glorifying God is simply to MAKE KNOWN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. That has been Jesus' work all along. Glorify me. It can sound so selfish and self-centered to our human ears until we stop to think about what it really means – what Jesus is really saying. Glorify me – make my life a reflection of Your Presence.

In verse three we hear Jesus define eternal life – **that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** Eternal life isn't a place or a time, but to be in relationship with God – to KNOW with our minds, bodies and souls, THE PRESENCE of GOD. Jesus' prayer FOR HIMSELF is a prayer FOR US...**FOR ALL.**

What an amazing and wonderful feeling we overhear; the Word binding us together with Jesus. Jesus is in harmony and united with God and that is what he, and God want for us – all who believe in and live “the way” will be united and harmonious with the Creator. Hear that prayer **FOR US.**

In verse six, Jesus specifically moves on to praying **FOR HIS DISCIPLES**, entrusting them to God's care and beyond. Remember that Jesus' prayer for the disciples includes you and me. Later in verse 20, Jesus says, “I'm praying not only for them, but also for those who **WILL** believe in me...” We are eavesdropping, overhearing Jesus praying to God **FOR US – the disciples, believers - then, now and yet to be.**

Mary Hinkle Shore, rector and dean of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University said of John 17, “We overhear a prayer on our behalf and are not called into action in that moment as much as wonder that the Father and the Son spend their time discussing the likes of us and our little community of faith.” That's that amazing feeling we experience when we overhear someone saying wonderful things about us.

- They care so much for me!
- I never knew they thought so highly of me.
- What I did really wasn't much, but how nice that it touched them in such a grand way.
- It's beautiful that they're praying for me and those I love.
- Really? God and Jesus love me THAT much that they want me to have **eternal life?**

It feels good to overhear Jesus and others praying FOR US. It can be especially comforting in those challenging times in our lives, when for reasons of anger, sorrow, guilt or unworthiness, we may find it difficult to pray for ourselves. When I can't pray, I'm not alone. Someone will pray **FOR ME.**

Embracing the joy and appreciation in overhearing that Jesus and others lift us up in prayer, leads us beyond that moment of wonder that Rev. Shore speaks of and moves us toward active prayer.

We understand that the world in which we live can be very complicated, sometimes cruel and uncertain. When we feel out of control, locked behind doors and masks ... we sometimes feel we have no agency other than prayer. That is true. Regardless of the circumstances, we can always pray FOR OURSELVS and FOR OTHERS and we take comfort being able to intercede on behalf of someone else. Praying FOR SOMEONE may seem too easy and not enough, especially when the phrase “you're in my thoughts and prayers” has been misused and abused so much in recent times. But we can't forget about the power of prayer. **Sincere and heart-felt** prayers of words transform into prayers of action.

In verse nine, Jesus says, “I pray for them. I'm not praying for the God-rejecting world, but for those you gave me....” Hear the pray **FOR US...and TO US.** Jesus prays for each individual human being to KNOW God, to be in relationship with God. In Jesus' teachings and ministry, his prayers weren't simply words, but actions. Jesus' prayers led him to the cross ... his prayers are for us to spread the Gospel and glorify God.

When we kneel before God, when we bow our heads before God, when we speak words to God, I think we understand that those prayers won't necessarily change God or the actions that God takes, but they do change us. Blaise Pascal, famous French mathematician of the 17th century said, "In calling us to pray for one another, God has extended to us the dignity of becoming causes."

The fact of the matter is that prayers are meddling. If we believe that God "has a plan," then what else is prayer other than sticking our noses into that plan?

Jesus prays for us to be in relationship with God – to be united and in harmony – with God. In such a relationship, we don't just pray words, giving them to God and then standing back waiting for something to happen. No! We pray as co-creators with our creator. We are in this WITH God, united together. We have a part to play and prayer is at its core.

We pray to KNOW the presence of God. Maybe someone might overhear us and be compelled to pray to God, "Glorify me!" We pray in a way that builds loving relationship and transforms our words into support, compassion, love and justice-seeking agency.

In verse 11, Jesus prays to God, "...my life is on display in them. For I'm no longer going to be visible in the world" (The Message Bible).

"The only hope for this world to know Jesus - is if those that claim to know Jesus act as if they do."¹

In our prayers that are heard and overheard let us pray to God –
THY will be done – IN me, THROUGH me, WITH me and FOR me. Glorify me that I may glorify You.

AMEN

¹ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easter7a>