

**May 28, 2017**  
**Rev. Dr. Tom Blair**

**“That They May All Be One”**  
**Second Presbyterian Church, Baltimore**

**John 7:1-11**

It may take us a little extra today for us to really hear and take in these words of Jesus. This is not the usual Memorial Day scripture passage you hear. As part of what is known as the high-priestly prayer, these words definitely sound like they are spoken in rarefied air. I am using the translation by Rev. Eugene Peterson today, which I seldom do- to help bring the words back to earth, which are more relevant to us than we know. They come to us at the intersection of the lives we live, viewed through the lens of the events of another week of ups and downs, what with the bombing in Manchester, England, and attacks in Cairo, Egypt- with another week of the seasons slowly turning toward summer, closer to the end of school, and all the events of our own lives coming in to play.

**(The Message, translation by Eugene Peterson)**

**Jesus said these things. Raising his eyes in prayer, he said: Father, it's time. Display the bright splendor of your Son so the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.**

**You put him in charge of everything human so he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.**

**And this is the real and eternal life: that they know you, the one and only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. I glorified you on earth by completing down to the last detail what you assigned me to do.**

**And now, Father, glorify me with your very own splendor, the very splendor I had in your presence before there was a world. I spelled out your character in detail to the men and women you gave me. They were yours in the first place; then you gave them to me, and they have now done what you said.**

**They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that everything you gave me is firsthand from you,**

**For the message you gave me, I gave them; and they took it, and were convinced that I came from you. They believed that you sent me.**

**I pray for them. I'm not praying for the God-defying world but for those you gave me, for they are yours by right.**

**Everything mine is yours, and yours mine, and my life is on display in them.**

**For I'm no longer going to be visible in the world. They'll continue in the world while I return to you. Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life that you conferred as a gift through me, so they can be one heart and mind as we are one heart and mind.**

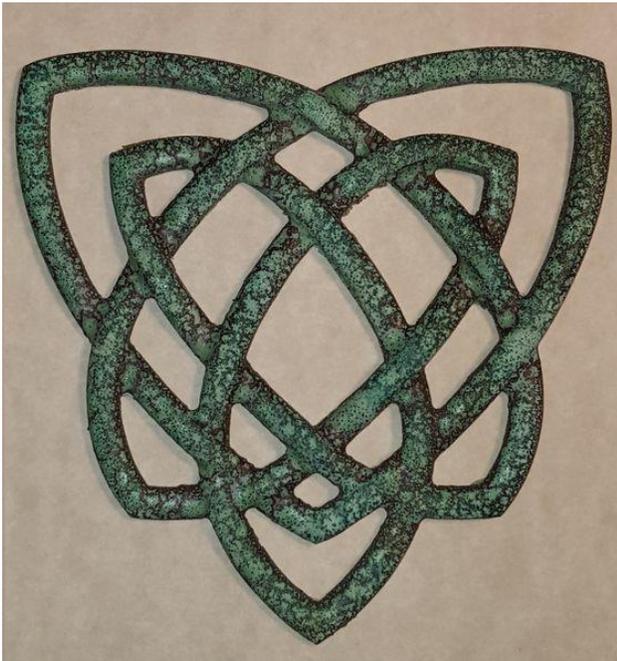
Working and living with this passage through the week, I realized that I've never preached on it before, and for that matter, never really got the point of it, either, until now- that is. I hope that I can make some sense of this for us all today.

This prayer of Jesus is divided into three sections, likely modeled after a famous prayer in the

Hebrew scriptures- a prayer of Aaron, the high priest, and Moses' brother. First Jesus addresses the Father and speaks of God's glory (as Peterson translates it- 'bright splendor'- a more visual rendition.) Then he prays for the disciples. Finally he prays for all who are to become followers in the times ahead.

The 'threeness' of this prayer is, by the way- why we have this bulletin cover for the day. It is called a 'triquetra', also known as the Trinity Knot, from Celtic tradition, made of one continuous line interweaving around itself, symbolizing no beginning or end, the unity of an eternal spiritual life and the world in which God has placed us.

But back to the prayer... There are clear parallels between the structure of this prayer and that



of Aaron, the high priest, in the Book of Leviticus. Aaron first prayed for himself, then for his priestly family, and then finally for the whole people.

This is the longest prayer of Jesus in John's gospel- comprising the entire chapter, 26 verses. You might remember about John's Gospel, that there is no prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, that if it be the Father's will, the cup might pass from him. (Which it didn't.)

Jesus in John's Gospel takes on a more triumphant, nearly majestic tone. He doesn't

agonize over the cross or his suffering, but sees his fate unfold as a time of glory. He is, as has been described- the 'Cosmic Christ' – with a view from well after the resurrection, reading back into his own life story new insight and meaning.

Jesus begins the prayer by addressing the Father and asking for his own glorification (the 'bright splendor'- in today's reading), which at first sounds kind of odd, but maybe is not so much, really. 'Glory' is a quality of Godhood- I guess it's like a child asking for the same qualities that he or she has seen in their parent, like stamina, courage, patience, a sense of humor, or resolve...

'Glory' emanates from God in the same way that the energy of our solar system comes from the sun. As the Son of God, Jesus has shared some of that glory and splendor in his life's work. Now, preparing to return to his Father once more, he asks to share all this one more time.

But he does so in a way that we might not be expecting...

If you imagine someone ‘basking in glory’ - where does your mind’s eye take you? Take a moment on this....

Perhaps it’s someone winning an Academy Award, with the spotlights on them and applause filling the hall. Maybe it’s someone winning an election, or a hard won competition, a race or a tennis match. In any of these situations, the prize has been won and it’s time to sit back and relax; to enjoy the victory and take it all in.

That is human glory. But it is not what Jesus does, or what Jesus is about. Jesus is fully integrated, fully connected, fully grounded in God.

Whereas we might have every reason to think that Jesus, at this time of self-glorification, might once again glow like on the Mount of Transfiguration, instead he turns his attention and his prayer toward us.

We are the focus of Jesus’ glorified attention. On behalf of his disciples, Jesus turns away from the dynamic of glory; for our sake- and the sake of God in the world. And Jesus prays for us. Jesus prays for us. Think about that a second; doesn’t that sound backwards?

We’re the ones who pray to Jesus, right? What’s he doing, turning the tables?

Imagine it this way — instead of Jesus, after having received his accolades, his Nobel Prize for Peace or whatever earthly award you might come up with, he steps down from the stage to join us in the crown. And he takes that award and puts it around **your** neck, just so.

Why? Because this is his true nature, and he knows it. This is what Jesus is about.

Jesus didn’t need to receive the award, the medal around his neck, to know what he was all about; but we needed to see him receive it. We need to have a way to see and acknowledge the full glory of God in Christ in order to know what kind of gift it is we receive in Jesus.

So when we think about the splendor of God in Jesus, and know what it is that he has received- the full, complete, pure love of God the Father, we can also begin to understand just what it is we receive in Christ.

This is what Jesus says: “Everything mine is yours, and yours mine, and my life is on display in them.” So- **our** lives put on display what Jesus gives us... this is what he prays for.

And he finally, in this first part of the prayer, asks for this: “that we may be one.”

The best way I’ve ever heard this petition for oneness described comes through Earl Palmer, a wonderful Bible scholar & Pastor, in a simple sentence. Oneness means “You belong

to Christ, I belong to Christ: We belong to each other.” That is unity in oneness... That is the gift Jesus gives each of us, and all of us, together....

Which brings me to my final point, here on this Memorial Day Sunday. It is clear enough through this prayer that Jesus shared that he knew what he was all about. He knew his life’s purpose- to embody and share God’s love fully and completely.... to draw humanity to God through his words and actions so that there would be no mistaking his purpose or presence.

That’s what his life was all about- and that’s what this prayer signifies.

Somehow, my thoughts have strayed this past week to those who have gone before us... not just those veterans who have served our country, and given their last full measure, (although they are very much included)- but also those in our families and our church family who we now miss.....

As I have prepared words for a number of our Saints over the past year, and have thought about their lives, considerably.... I’ve come to realize that Jesus’ prayer for us leads us to a common realization and acknowledgment. And it's perhaps something that we as Presbyterians aren’t so great at.

We are very good acknowledging the grace of God in the lives of those who are dearly departed- and we celebrate them with praise and thanksgiving.

But, what we don’t often do so well is to recognize, on that this side of a Memorial Service, this side of the divide between life and death, we have equally been given the fullness of God, in Jesus’ prayers for us, even daily.

The fact is that we are, even now, fully loved and cherished by God in Jesus Christ- we are given the Medal of Honor by Christ (as it were.)

In accepting that award, realizing God’s love for us in our lives, chosen for a purpose, what else can we do but accept it and live in gratitude and praise? Amen.