

“Made Your Name Known”

John 17: 1-19

We continue our journey through Jesus’ last moments with his disciples according to the Gospel of John. For the last two weeks, we have heard John’s version of Jesus’ last minute instructions for his disciples and this week, we hear again about the very last moment that he has with his disciples before his arrest, betrayal, and crucifixion. And as I mentioned last week, This whole section is known as the “Farewell Disclosure. And during this disclosure, Jesus offers the disciples words of comfort, not in the form of instruction, but in the form of prayer on their behalf.

I’m sure many of us are thinking right now, So if this is a farewell disclosure, why are we taking the time to keep going back to this moment when we know the rest of the story already? We know that this last night is not the end of the story. We know and have experienced the promise of the resurrection that we read about just a few weeks ago.

So why go back to the night of the farewell when we are called to move forward as the church? Why are we dwelling on the past when we proclaim that the kingdom of God is happening right now in the present? Why go back?

We've all been told that we cannot go back and recreate the past. It's not healthy. We know this because even we will admit that if we are truly honest with ourselves, the past is never as good as we remember it. We idealize it. We only remember the good things and seem to forget the bad.

So why do we keep going back to this moment, to this night, to this instance in time before the resurrection when in reality we are called to be a resurrection people? And the answer to these questions is simple. We do this because we are called by a God who knows no limit or boundaries in time. We do this as a way to remind ourselves that by reviewing this night, we have a constant reminder that our God was working in the beginning, that our God was even working on that very night, that our God is working now, and that our God will always be working on our behalf as people of God.

It may seem strange to remember this particular pre-resurrection night but we do this as a reminder that by remembering we claim even more the power of the resurrection.

We do this, not to recreate that night between Jesus and his disciples, not to control the details of the story, not to set boundaries on our experience with God. We do this, the retelling of this night, the retelling of this moment, between Teacher and students, between master and his disciples, between Jesus and his

friend to remember our calling. We remember that night of farewell between Jesus and the ones who will carry on the journey, who will share the Good News, who will help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth to remind ourselves that we are not alone. We do this to remember, remember the power in the story of the resurrection, to remember the comfort in the story of the resurrection and yes, most importantly, to remember the hope that is driving force in the story of resurrection, which is our Story, which is The story, which is God's story of mercy and grace.

As I was working on this sermon and began to think about my task of retelling this story which tells of God's mercy and grace for all of God's people, I started thinking about the disciples who were gathered around Jesus that night in the upper room. They had just finished dinner and needless to say, it was different from their usual Passover feasts. Jesus calls them to be servant leaders and when he realizes that they are not getting the concept, he unwraps his robe, grabs a towel and a basin of water, and then gently washes their feet with care. And then after this act, Jesus tells them that he will be leaving them soon but they will not be left completely alone. That God will be sending the Holy Spirit to work on their behalf, to guide them and comfort them, to give them strength for the journey.

And if this talk about being servant leaders and the Holy Spirit wasn't confusing enough, Jesus begins to talk about his death. He begins to say how one of his disciples would betray and how Peter would deny him. This was not their

usual Passover feast. And then to top it all off, Jesus gives them a new commandment: to love another as Jesus loved them, to rely and support one another, to be responsible to and for one another.

I start thinking about how uncomfortable it must have been for everyone at that moment after dinner. No one knew exactly what was going on. I'm sure they had a million questions but weren't sure where to begin to start asking any of them. I'm sure They were confuse and scared. And I'm sure that they just wanted it to go back to the way it was, to the way it used to be when Jesus would teach them about the Kingdom of God, the way it used to be when crowds followed them, the way it was before all this talk about death and dying started.

I'm sure of all these things that the disciples must have been feeling because we have all felt them at some point in our own lives especially in moments and times of transition and change. It is not hard for us to imagine what the disciples must have been feeling and thinking because we know that these moments of change and transition are uncomfortable and they leave us with too many unanswered questions.

We know exactly what the disciples are feeling at that moment on that night of farewell. No one knows what the future may for them. No one knows how it is

all going to turn out. No one knows what the next step exactly is to take in that moment.

The only person who does is Jesus. At this moment of confusion, at this moment of uncertainty for the disciples, Jesus offers them a few last words, not “instructions on how be better but a prayer to God” on their behalf. He offers up a prayer on their behalf as a reminder that when they don’t know which direction to go, the best direction to go is to God.

as I pondered the disciples’ reaction to this moment of change, this moment of transition, to this moment of uncertainty, to this prayer given on their behalf, I realized that once again Jesus gave us a gift that will never lose its value. The knowledge that through this very real, very emotional, very vulnerable moment between Jesus and God, we are cared for and loved more than we will ever know by our Lord and Savior. Knowledge that we can treasure, knowledge that will comfort us, knowledge that will strengthen us, knowledge that will sustain all the days of our lives.

As this blessing began to sink in, I realized that this prayer is simply not just prayed on behalf of Jesus’ disciples who lived two thousand years ago, but that this prayer is prayed by Jesus on behalf of all of us. It is prayed on behalf of me. It is prayed on behalf of all of us gathered here today. It is prayed on behalf of all those

who have gone before, who are here now, and all those who will come after us. It is prayed on behalf of all of those who have ever, and who will ever embrace their mission and calling to share the Good news of the resurrection and become the people that God created them to be.

Like the God we serve, this prayer knows no limits in time. This prayer knows no boundaries of past, present and future. This prayer is as relevant as it was some two thousand years ago for all of Jesus' disciples who are facing times of change and transition. This prayer is a word of reassurance in an unsettling time. It is a word of hope in a time of transition. It is a word of encouragement in a time of uncertainty. It is a word of strength for the journey ahead.

The Good News for all of us past, present, and future is that By offering a prayer on the disciples' behalf and on our behalf, Jesus is "entrust[ing] the community to God's care." Jesus is offering up the hope and the fervent desire that the community of faith will live a life "shaped by the knowledge of" God's love. Jesus is reminding God of God's promises of security, the promises of protection, and the promises of new life. Through this prayer, Jesus is offering up the true comfort that can only be found in the arms of God for his followers then, two thousand years ago and now for us today as modern day believers.

Through this prayer, Jesus is offering up words of strength on our behalf as followers who have experienced the power of new life through the resurrection. And reminding us as his disciples that it is only by looking back and remembering this prayer through the lens of the resurrection that we will have the strength to continue our journey through this uncertain time.

That is why we look back and remember. We look back and remember how much Jesus' loved us then and how much he continues to love us now. And through this love of grace and mercy, through this prayer prayed on our behalf, we discover that we can support, love, and encourage one another in this time of transition and change. We discover that we truly can move forward with the journey ahead. We discover that we can step out of our comfort zones and embrace transition and change regardless of our very human desire to 'cling to what [we] have known when we realize that things are no longer what they were before.'" And the good news being shared with us through this prayer, is that just like the disciples, in moments of transition and change we can 'rethink [our] priorities, reorder [our] lives, and reconstitute [our] community' " without fear, without worry, and without wondering what will happen next . Because we rest secure in the knowledge that God is in control, that God only wants the best for us, that God is watching over us.

Yes, it may be a daunting task. Yes it may be a very scary task. Yes, it may be a task that comes with a million questions and not many answers. But the Good news is that we can find comfort, strength and hope that we are a part of the community for whom Jesus prays.

We as a church are going through a time of uncertainty. We are going through a time of change and transition. We are going through a time where we are being asked to rethink our priorities, reorder our lives, and reconstitute our community. It is a daunting task. It is a scary task. It is a task that has a million and one questions about how it is all going to work out and what the future will hold for us. And in this time of change and transition, we are invited to listen in on the prayer that Jesus is lifting up on our behalf and to find comfort, strength and hope in being a part of the community for whom Jesus prays.

Jesus' last words to us as people of faith is not a list of instruction on how to be better people, or to live out our faith more fully in our lives. Jesus' last words to us as people of faith is a prayer to God on our behalf.

May we take comfort and encouragement that we have God there to guide us and lead us during this time of change and transition. Amen.