

“Praying on Behalf”

John 17:20-26

I recently began a book by Anne Lamont, titled “Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers.” The basic premise of this book is that all prayer can be boiled down to these three words: help, thanks, and wow. And that we are the ones as people of faith who complicate the issue of prayer. Lamont goes on to say that there is something to be said about keeping prayer simple and that the starting place, the place where we should begin when we go to God in prayer is by starting with an honest conversation with our God.

As I read Lamont’s words, I couldn’t help but think about today’s Scripture. I invite you to turn in your pew bibles to John 17: 20-26.

(Read text)

There it is: Jesus’ last moments with his disciples. He goes to God in prayer. And not just any prayer, but prayer on behalf of the disciples. What amazes me most about this passage is that Jesus goes to prayer on behalf of the people who will betray him. Jesus goes to prayer on behalf of the people who will deny him. Jesus goes to prayer on behalf of the people who will abandon him.

It is hard to wrap my mind around this one, especially since I know the end of the story. What do you think was going through Jesus’ mind in that upper room at that time? I have had lots of thoughts on this but never did I really expect him to

be praying on behalf of the disciples, praying on behalf of the people who would hurt him the most. But here he is, in his last moments, praying, praying to God, praying on behalf of the disciples, praying on behalf of the very people who would deny him, betray him and abandon him?

When I hear Jesus' prayer, it reminds me that once again I am not Jesus. But his prayer also reminds me of how thankful I am for that fact as well. But ultimately, Jesus' prayer on behalf of his disciples, on behalf of the very ones who betray and deny him, reminds me of how thankful I am for God's grace in my life. It reminds me of how thankful I am for the healing nature of God's grace to restore broken relationships. Ultimately, Jesus' prayer makes me grateful that there is such a thing as grace in our lives.

Because, I'll be honest, when I read this Scripture, I realize that there are just some things that I may never have the strength to do, mainly praying on behalf of the very people who would hurt me the most. Sure I know I am supposed to do. But there is a sometimes a big gap between what I am supposed to do and what I am capable of doing.

But here, in this Scripture, we are once again given an example of why God is God and we are not. because regardless of what was going to happen to him later on, Jesus is still able pray on behalf of his disciples.

I'm sure, Looking back on this moment, after all that happened at the cross and beyond, this must have been a very humbling realization for the disciples. To know that in spite of it all, Jesus loved them enough to look beyond their faults and frailties and pray for them, to pray to God on their behalf. It must have been very humbling to realize that Jesus was still able to love them, to call them friend and in spite of what they had done or what they were going to do, Jesus was still able to ask for them to be surrounded with God's peace. And he does this by having an honest and open conversation with God.

He doesn't use flashy phrases. Jesus doesn't use big words to prove how smart he is to the disciples gathered in the upper room that night. He simply goes to God in prayer. He simply begins with an honest conversation with his God. He says help. He says thanks. He says wow. All on behalf of his disciples. To the very ones who would hurt him the most, Jesus is still able to show grace. he knows, that no matter what, his disciples will be the ones left behind, wondering and worrying. They will be the ones who will need to receive God's word, the ones who will need to hear God's guidance. They will be the ones who will need to receive God's love once more.

For us who know the rest of the story, It may seem sort of strange to go back and take another look at these last few moments that Jesus had with his disciples, to hear once again his instructions. But the more and more I think of these last few

moments with Jesus and his disciples, the more and more I begin to realize that this is not just some ordinary prayer. It is a sign of love. It is a sign of grace. It is a sign of care and comfort. Sure it may seem odd to go back and take another look at that moment in the upper room when we know how the story ends, but when we do we realize that this is more than just interaction between Jesus and his disciples. He is giving them a promise, a reassurance that there will always be somebody there, loving them enough, caring for them enough to go to God on their behalf.

So the more and more I think about these last few moments between Jesus and his disciples, the more and more I realize that it is not just the disciples who need to have this promise, this reassurance. As a person of faith, I also need to know that someone is praying to God on my behalf. We all need to know that someone is praying to God on our behalf.

When we look back on this passage, look back at the cross, when we look forward to what comes next in our lives, it is reassuring to know that there is always someone praying on my behalf. That there has always been someone who was filled with God's grace, someone who was filled with God's love, someone who gets how God's kingdom works, praying for me, praying on my behalf. Someone who could see that we needed something, who could see that we were struggling, who was simply able to say-God, They need you right now.

Looking back over my life, there has always been someone who loved me enough to pray to God on my behalf, to simply say: God, you know what Heather needs right now, or to simply say, God, I'm not sure what to ask for but I'm just lifting up Heather. She needs you right now. Looking back, I have always know that There has been someone who loved me enough to say: God, I'm praying on behalf of someone that I love.

And I am not alone in this realization. We all have this wonderful gift. And we are so truly thankful for it in our lives because As I look at our world, with all its uncertainty, we all need to know that someone is praying for us, for God's creation. We all need to know that God is in control, that God is still working. We all need to know that God will have the last word. We all need to know that someone loves us enough to pray on our behalves.

Because With every angry, hurtful word in the media, with every broken relationship that divides the Body of Christ, with every separation in our world bombarding us as people of faith, our world is suffering more and more. we need to know someone is praying, on our behalves. we need to know that someone loves us enough, cares about us enough to simply say: God, be with them right now. They need you so much.”

Because Let's face it: we are hurting. We are broken. And we need to know someone cares about us, and loves us enough to show us some grace, to give us some peace. We all need to know that someone loves us enough, cares about us enough to pray to God on our behalves.

The same way the disciples needed this promise, this reassurance that night in the upper room. I'm sure that After Jesus shared he was going to die, after Jesus shared that one of his very own would betray him, after Jesus shared that one of his disciples would deny him, I'm sure that there were no words. Their very foundations of faith, of certainty, were crumbling and I'm sure that they needed to know someone cared.

I'm sure that at that very moment, all The disciples needed were words of comfort, words of peace. They needed to know that someone loved them enough, cared about them enough to pray to God on their behalves And that is exactly what Jesus did. He lifts up a prayer to God on their behalf. He asks for help. He gives thanks. He says wow for all the blessings that God has shared with him and with his disciples.

In that moment, when all the disciples could see were broken relationships, Jesus offers them words of comfort. He loves them enough, cares about them enough to pray to God on their behalf. He offers words of love, not in the form of

instruction, but in the form of prayer. At this point, when all they could see was brokenness and fault, Jesus offers them hope. Jesus sees beyond their frailties and their faults and prays for them to God on their behalf.

At this moment of confusion, at this moment of uncertainty, Jesus offers them a few last words. And these last words are not “instructions on how to be a better person but a prayer to God” on their behalf. the disciples are invited to listen in on this conversation, on this very intimate moment between Jesus and God, on this very real, very emotional, very vulnerable moment which shows how much Jesus cares for his disciples, for his friends. And we are invited to listen as well. because in this same moment of confusion, , this same moment of uncertainty, Jesus’ prayer is simply not just prayed on behalf of Jesus’ disciples who lived two thousand years ago. His prayer is prayed on behalf of all of us living today as well. It is prayed on behalf of you. It is prayed on behalf of me. It is prayed on behalf of all of us as communities of faith, past, present and future.

Jesus’ prayer, his open and honest conversation with God, is a word of reassurance in all unsettling times for all of God’s people. It is a word of encouragement in all times of uncertainty for all of God’s disciples. It is a word of strength for the journey ahead for all of God’s children. Jesus loves us enough,

cares about us enough to simply say: God, be with my disciples right now. Jesus' prayer is for all of us, past, present and future.

And that is the Good News that I bring this morning. 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. Jesus is offering up the comfort that was found in the arms of God for his followers then, two thousand years ago and it is still being offered now. Jesus is offering up a prayer on our behalf as followers who live in a world that is more broken than ever, who simply just need to know that someone still loves us enough, cares for us enough to say: God be with them right now.

Through his prayer, Jesus reminded the disciples that God had formed an astonishingly different community here on earth. And this community represented God's New Age. It is a community that is not based on labels. It is not a community that divides, separates or excludes. It is not a community that thrives on uniformity, but celebrates everyone's gifts for ministry, celebrates the diversity and uniqueness of all God's children.

through Jesus' words of his prayer, he reminds his disciples the strength and purpose of this community rests securely in God's grace. God's grace empowers, renews, refreshes and builds up God's Kingdom here on earth. God's grace is what will give the disciples comfort for the journey and God's grace is what will sustain God's New Age here on earth. And by looking back and remembering this prayer, we do have the strength to continue our journey through this uncertain time and all the uncertain times that may fill our lives.

And as followers of Jesus Christ, we find comfort knowing that God is in control, We find hope that we are a part of the community. We find grace because we realize that there will always be someone who loves us enough, who cares for us enough to pray to God on our behalf, even when we can say the words ourselves.

And what better news to share with all of God's children right now. We as a nation, as a world, as a community are going through a time of uncertainty. We have a million and one questions about how it is all going to work out and what the future will hold for us. Things seem to be falling apart everyday. And we find that more and more we need words of comfort, words of strength. More and more we need to know that someone is praying for us on our behalf, more and more we need to know that someone loves us enough, cares about us enough to simply say: God, be with them right now. They need you so much.

So Today, we are invited to listen in on this prayer that Jesus is lifting up on our behalf and to find comfort, strength and hope Jesus' last words to us as people of faith is not a list of instruction on how to be better people. Jesus' last words to us, the ones who are called to carry on the Kingdom work in a world that is broken, his last words to us were a reassurance that there will always be someone who loves us enough, who cares about us enough to say God, they need you right now. Jesus' last words to us are a promise that God's grace will always be available for us, even when we can't say the prayer ourselves. 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 will always have God there to guide us and lead us through all times of uncertainty. May we find strength and hope, knowing that there will always be someone who loves us enough, who cares about us enough to pray to God on our behalf. Amen.