

John 17: 20-26
"Faithful Eavesdropping"
May 29, 2022
Rev. Lou Nyiri

[title slide]

This morning's message is based, upon John 17: 20-26, let's lean in & listen...to God's word for us this day...

[scripture slides]

²⁰ "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, ²² so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²³ The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²⁴ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁵ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁶ "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁷ I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them."

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

[Title slide]

Sermon

A young child whose mother was tucking him into bed one evening before the first day of school – was nervous and scared – and so he asked his mother, can you pray for me now? She said, 'Yes, of course.'

And as she began to pray their nightly prayer, the child stopped her and said, 'No, mother. I want you to pray for me how you pray for me after you've tucked us into bed – after you've turned out the light – when you come back into the room and watch over us while we're sleeping.'

He let her in on the fact that he and his siblings had all awakened a time or two and knew about her nightly routine – after she thought they were asleep. They knew she would stand by the hall door praying for them – and though they could see her lips move they could never make out the words.

He wanted to hear the “really real” prayers she offered for them – especially, on the eve of a big, unknown day for him.

This prompts for us the question, what does it mean to be able to eavesdrop on the words being said for you when someone you trust is putting you before the God who loves us / keeps us / is with us / calls us into being.

Today is the 7th Sunday of Easter within the liturgical calendar. Next Sunday is Pentecost – when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and starts their work – in Jesus’ physical absence – as the body of Christ taking good news into their surrounding communities and eventually throughout the globe.

On this 7th Sunday of Easter, it is common for some portion of John 17 – known as “Jesus High Priestly Prayer” – to show up within the lectionary.

Year A – it is verses 1-11 where Jesus prays for himself.

Year B – it is verses 6-19 where Jesus prays for his disciples.

Year C – it is verses 20-26 (today’s verses) where Jesus prays for his yet-to-be believers – those who came to faith after and as a result of the faithful life lived by Jesus’ first century disciples.

John 17: 20-26, is a prayer on behalf of the believers whom Jesus’ disciples will bring into the fold – i.e. you and me – this may be why some commentators refer to John 17 as “the other Lord’s prayer” – for this is a prayer which Jesus’ contemporary disciples got to overhear.

The words Jesus prays for us in John 17:20-26 are clarion, resonating words – calling us to be representative of the love which God has for us / love which Christ showed us / a love which the Holy Spirit reminds us we are called to share and empowers us to share –

Jesus prays, “...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (vv. 21-22)

John 17 is the last stanza of what we know in John’s gospel as “Jesus’ Farewell Discourse” – which begins in John 13, which, as you may recall, is Jesus’ Farewell Meal – the place where Jesus washed the disciples feet and gave them the new commandment to love one another as Christ had loved them - & by this everyone will know you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.

John's gospel is very much about witness / testimony – it isn't so much about verbal evangelism as it is life evangelism – showing the good news in how we relate to the communities in which we find ourselves – like the quote attributed to Saint Francis, “preach the gospel every day and when necessary, use words.”

John's gospel is about being a people who bear living witness and who give testimony to God's grace at work in and through the community – a community that has been transformed by Jesus' love and who transforms the communities in which they find themselves by that same love.

“...by this they will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another...” (John 13)

“...so that the love with which God loved Christ may be in us and Christ in us...” (John 17)

By extension, then, if this is a prayer by Jesus for us – a prayer we get to eavesdrop on – if this prayer is the culmination of Jesus' farewell words to disciples then & now, and if those words begin and end with us bearing witness to God's love in Christ – a love which is to be shared with the hurts of the world around us, then, we might pose the following question to ourselves, “how are we doing?”

How are we loving the world around us?

How are we bearing Christ in this world?

When confronted by what is going on in the world – what is our response?

How do we respond when we hear:

- According to the last known data collection in 2020, 37.2 million people lived in poverty – up some 3.9 million from 2019.
- October 2021, it was predicted that around 58.9 million young children (almost South Africa's whole population) will face life-threatening malnutrition by the end of this year.
- According to a 2021 Department of Veterans Affairs report, among the 45,861 adults who died by self-inflicted means, 13.7% were veterans (6,261).
- According to National Suicide Prevention reports, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in adults 24-35 & youth ages 15-24 //
 - 1 out of 15 high school youth report attempting suicide
 - 1 out of 53 high school youth report the attempt was serious enough to be treated by a doctor or nurse.
 - LGBTQ youth are **more than four times as likely** to attempt suicide than their peers
 - Having **at least one accepting adult** can reduce the risk of a suicide attempt among LGBTQ young people by 40 percent
- 9% (28.8 million Americans) will have an eating disorder in their lifetime
 - 10,200 deaths result each year as a direct result
 - That's 1 death every 52 minutes

- Over 1/3 of Americans live in areas designated as mental health professional shortage areas – these are areas with fewer mental health providers than the minimum number their population would need.
- 1 in 4 woman & 1 in 7 men will be victim of severe violence as a result of domestic violence in their lifetime.
- In 2021, there were nearly 108,000 drug related overdose deaths in the United States.
- By the end of April, in this year, we have had more mass shootings than the number of days from January 1 to May 31.
 - This does not include anything from the month of May.

In the wake of Uvalde, TX, hymn writer, Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, penned the following words:

God, our nation feels the loss
 As our children pay the cost
 For the violence we accept,
 For the silence we have kept.
 Rachel weeps for children gone;
 God of love, this can't go on!

How long, O Lord, will it be, before we do not have to post anymore “how long o lord” posts?

What is disheartening for me is that I have prayers saved on the cloud and all I need to do is change the name of the location and the prayer fits.

We pray for the people of: Columbine ... Sandy Hook ... Uvalde...

When will we stop changing the names of the places and start changing the places in which we live?

How will we, as the body of Christ, respond?

Thoughts and prayers only go as far as actions and change.

Gandhi said, “be the change you want to see in the world.”

Jesus said, “be the disciple God calls you to be by how you love in this world.”

On this Memorial Day weekend, when we remember those who gave their life that we might be free – may we remember what it means to be free.

Some words that keep coming to my mind, are the words of the [Garth Brooks] song *We Shall Be Free*:

This ain't comin' from no prophet
 Just an ordinary man.

When I close my eyes, I see
The way this world [could] be
When we all walk hand in hand.

When the last child cries for a crust of bread,
When the last man dies for just words that he said,
When there's shelter over the poorest head,
We shall be free.

When the last thing we notice is the color of skin,
When the first thing we look for is the beauty within,
When the skies and the oceans are clean again,
We shall be free.

When we're free to love anyone we choose,
When this world's big enough for all different views,
When we all can worship from our own kind of pew,
We shall be free.

When money talks for the very last time,
And nobody walks a step behind;
When there's only one race,
And that's [human]kind,
Then we shall be free.

Do we have the courage to make it so?

Amen.

Statistical Links:

Eating Disorders

<https://anad.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ANAD-Eating-Disorders-Fact-Sheet-v2.pdf>

<https://anad.org/eating-disorders-statistics/>

School Shootings

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2022/01>

Veteran Affairs – Suicide Prevention

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-9-8-21.pdf>

CDC Data, Statistics and Reporting Site

<https://www.cdc.gov/injury/data-statistics-reporting.html>

Domestic Violence

<https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>

Drug-related Overdose Deaths

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/05/11/us-overdose-deaths-record-107000-2021-cdc/>

Suicide Statistics – LGBTQ youth

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>

Suicide Statistics

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-suicide-prevention#:~:text=Suicide%20is%20the%20second%20leading,among%20youth%20age%2015%2D24.&text=Approximately%20one%20out%20of%20every,reports%20attempting%20suicide%20each%20year.&text=One%20out%20of%20every%2053,a%20doctor%20or%20a%20nurse.>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBSDataSummaryTrendsReport2019-508.pdf>

Lyrics to “We Shall Be Free”

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/garthbrooks/weshallbefree.html>

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<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+17%3A+20-26&version=NRSVUE&interface=print>