**June 1, 2014 – 7th Sunday of Easter**

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This Gospel passage from John is one of the most bewildering I’ve ever read. It’s a tangle of possessives and descriptions that’s hard to wade through. For example, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.” Or this one, “So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.”

I can’t even pull out a fancy Greek word to examine, because they’re all really simple words – I, you, them, glory, eternal life.

But I can pull out two sentences that pull this whole prayer together, which I’ll get to in a minute. Because this is a prayer, as is clear by the first phrase, “Jesus looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father…”

This is John’s version of Jesus’ final prayer before his arrest. It’s remarkably different from those in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In all three of those prayers of Jesus, he is alone. They are not being prayed in front of the disciples at dinner, as it is here in John. In the synoptic prayers, Jesus is sad and anxious, and is desperately praying for the strength to follow God’s will to the end. And in those prayers, Peter, James, and John, fall asleep, which further adds to Jesus’ sorrow.

But this prayer is different. It has an air of finality, certainly, but the tone is much more upbeat and here Jesus is praying, not for himself, but for his disciples and those who would be led to believe by the disciples’ words. It’s a prayer of affirmation of all that Jesus had done during his ministry, and the passing of the torch on to his followers. Remember, before, during, and after all of the signs that Jesus did in the Gospel of John, he talked about it all being to demonstrate the glory of God. This prayer is, in part, his acknowledgement that he has finished the job.

So what is all the “all mine are yours and yours are mine” business all about? By the way, every time I read this passage, I can’t help but think of that line from the Beatles’song, *I Am the Walrus*, “I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together.” And now, those of you who grew up with that song won’t be able to not think of it either. You’re welcome!

So what is it all about? As I mentioned, there are two lines of this prayer that inform all the rest, I think. The first is, “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

This is eternal life, that they may know you. Eternal life in the Fourth Gospel isn’t heaven. It’s not clouds and harps and wings and jokes about the Baptists thinking they’re alone up there. Eternal life is knowing God. It’s being in a relationship with God. More than that, it’s being a CHILD of God.

And all those possessives, “all mine are yours and yours are mine,” don’t indicate that we are God’s property. They indicate that we are God’s FAMILY, through our relationship with Jesus Christ. This is more than a prayer. This is a promise!

The second important sentence is the very last one in this passage, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Okay, there IS one Greek word that I found particularly interesting in this passage after all. That word is *téreó*, which is translated as “protect.” It’s the exact same word that Jesus uses in last week’s reading, when he tells his disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” This verb means to guard or to watch over, as in something precious. Jesus tells his disciples not just to follow his commandments, specifically to love God and to love each other, but to take care of and guard those commandments after he is gone.

Here, he is asking God to watch over us, just as we are watching over his love in the world. He’s asking God to protect us, not just from danger, or maybe not from danger at all, but from the cares and worries and strife of the world, to keep them from damaging or destroying the love we have for him and each other.

Jesus is asking God to do this in order to preserve the family. “…So that they may be one, as we are one.” This is where all of those possessives come into it. Jesus is making it clear that we are in a new relationship, with God and with one another. We are all one. We are a community, together in this world and in eternal life. And that community is knit together by the love of God through his Son.

Families are funny things. Sometimes they don’t get along. Sometimes they hurt each other. But when God’s love is at the center of a family, there isn’t anything they can’t accomplish together. We in the Church seem to have forgotten this very important lesson. We have forgotten that all of God’s children are in relationship with each other, and we definitely forget to love each other sometimes.

We need to get back to the unity that Jesus is praying about here – that they may be one as we are one. Hospitality, outreach, charity, ecumenism – all of these are names for that unity. I’m not sure how this will manifest itself, but I’m pretty sure, among other things, that it probably will be uncomfortable at times.

Rather than shying away from that discomfort, we, as a community, need to acknowledge and work through it. To do that we could do worse than to read this prayer over often, along with the other one that Jesus taught us, the one that starts, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” We could do worse than to pray for those members of our family (both biological and eternal) who bug us, or who hurt us, or who hate us.

Let’s pray together as a family now. This is the Prayer for the Unity of the Church, found on page 818 of the Book of Common Prayer.

The Lord be with you,

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.