

May 13, 2018

Jesus Prayed for His Friends & You Should Too

Annette Hill Briggs

John 17:6-19

⁶“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Jesus' farewell discourse has shifted. He was talking TO the disciples about being faithful to God. Now he's talking to God about the disciples. He's praying for them. Jesus prayed for his friends, and we should too. We should pray for each other, like he prayed for us: with our grown-up glasses on; seeing the world as it really is; and us in it, as Jesus means us to be. *As my Father has sent me, so send I you.* God sent Jesus. Jesus sends us.

Here in chapter 17, the disciples – whom Jesus has promoted from servants to friends, remember – are *overhearing* Jesus talking to someone else. Dr. Fred Craddock was the first homiletics scholar to notice and study deeply Jesus' habit of seeming to teach one group or person, while clearly intending a more pointed message for someone else – usually disciples or Pharisees. And that pointed message was almost always, the outrageous love/grace/justice of God.

The way Jesus was smuggling the gospel into that overheard message is sort of like how I used to puree vegetables into spaghetti sauce and sloppy joes when Emy was a little kid,

so that it was still technically spaghetti or sloppy joes. Here, technically, Jesus IS just praying. Hard for them to argue what he says, since they'd have to admit they were spying. Jesus is leaving them, remember. He's soon to be arrested, tortured, killed. Then rise. Forever after that he'll be with them in Spirit, far closer than they've known him so far. But they can't fathom that. Only that he's leaving them.

He's leaving them like when we leave our kids at college. To our parent eyes, they look like toddlers in a tiny room floating in a sea of boxes. It seems nuts to leave them in charge of themselves. Jesus is leaving his friends in charge of the kingdom of God in this world. Depending on the kid, leaving a toddler to run the world seems nuts. But what is the alternative? Take them home and make their lunch for forty years?

Jesus cannot stay. The one thing left that he can do, he can only do alone: die. And so he prayed for them, in that overhearing way of his, that we'd be wise enough and brave enough to see this world as it really is – and make our lives and our life together in it as Jesus means for us to be. First, first, first, Jesus means his friends to overhear that We. Belong. To. Him. Verse 6: *"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me."* Verse 10: *"All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them."*

We Are His. The moment we know it, it is the most true thing about us. We spend the rest of our lives learning to live our faith in it, whatever happened to us before that moment we first knew it; whatever someone else said about who or whose or what we are; whatever story we carry about who we were or how we came to be. Maybe somebody said you weren't much. Maybe you overheard somebody important say you were nothing but a bother. No matter who it was that said it, whatever you've heard said about you up to this very moment, hear this: The Lord God of heaven and earth says, *You. Are. Mine. You don't belong to anyone in this world more than you belong to me.*

Another thing Jesus says to God **about** his beloved friends is that we are very, very well endowed. We are rich as rich can be in all the things that make a human being rich. Verses 7 and 8: *"Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."*

We do love our things, don't we? Northeast Arkansas is full of Hmong people, immigrants from Vietnam after the war. The people who came and their children have mostly worked in the Tyson chicken factories there. The third generation, however, are now entering college. My oldest friend, Angela, works for Student Services at U of A in Fayetteville. A couple of years ago she was with a team of students moving freshmen into their dorm rooms. Just like IU, some students literally need a U-Haul to move into half a dorm room. But in the sea of U-Hauls and minivans was a young Hmong man. And all he had was his backpack, one enormous suitcase and a 50-pound bag of rice. He said he tried to explain the dorm cafeteria, but his grandmother could not fathom a place you could go for a year and not have to take any food with you. Angela saw him later in

the school year and asked about the 50 pounds of rice. He said he and his roommate found lots of uses for it, including a launch into the top bunk and a beanbag chair.

If believing I already have everything I need to be faithful isn't the hardest part of being Christian, I am sure I don't know what is. Some days I spend more energy *wanting* and *needing* that actually working. Or imagining *what I could do with what I don't have* than *doing what I can with what I do have*. We don't need to know what we have, to believe we have it, any more than a child needs to know what's in the pantry to know he'll get fed. That's faith in God's goodness, born of God's faithfulness to us.

Listening, we overhear Jesus tell the Lord that we belong to them, apparently they've been trading us back and forth like aunties at Thanksgiving. We've forever belonged to one or the other. Whom we have never belonged to, Jesus says in verse 16, is the world. "*They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.*" We live here. We are not from here. This world is not home. God wants us here, for now.

One time when I was in Seoul, Korea, I decided to ride the subway to a far neighborhood and walk my way back to our hotel. I walked through markets and parks and Temples. Then I got really hungry. Street food is easy in Seoul. You point to what you want and pay for it. Nicer restaurants are pretty easy, as we know a few Korean dishes we like and can always order. Bibimbap or bulgogi or kimchi.

I thought, "I wonder if I can order fast food?" Do I know the Korean word for *ham-burger*? I do not. Can I read Korean? I can not. The menu board had no pictures, and the drinks were none I recognized. It was just like fast food here, people behind me in the line with kids wanting me to hurry up. I had to point and pray there was no octopus involved. I learned I like mustard and mayonnaise mixed together. I knew I wasn't in the U.S. It didn't seem like I was in Korea. I didn't even feel like I was inside my own skin. Inside my own skin, I'm competent. And literate.

Every human wants to feel at home, at ease, comfortable in their skin. Jesus' friends are NOT supposed to be at home in this world. Jesus' friends are at home where peace reigns. Jesus' friends are at home where justice rolls down like water. Jesus' friends are at home where righteousness flows like a never-ending stream. Jesus' friends are at home where rich and poor feast together and none are turned away, where children rise up in joy and fall asleep in safety, forevermore. And that is not this world, friends. How could the friends of Jesus ever feel at home here? And yet, here we are. Sent and blessed by Him with everything we need to run the kingdom of heaven this side of heaven. *The world won't love ya for it, either*, the disciples hear him say, more or less. He asks God to *protect them*, suggesting that this world's dangerous.

I have three children. All three could walk down the same sidewalk at the same time and only one of them faceplant into a tree. He was always looking one way and walking another. The sidewalk wasn't dangerous. He was. This world is dangerous, or we're a danger to ourselves. But either way, we aren't safe without the Lord. Even Jesus thinks

it's so. More dangerous for some than others. Into that divide Jesus sends us, between the ones for whom it is and the ones for whom it isn't.

For whom is this world most dangerous? for the weak and poor? Yes, but only marginally. I'd say for the ones not watching where they're going; the ones who think this is all there is: what they can see and hear and experience here, this side of eternity. And the danger, it seems to me, isn't death, but hopelessness. Despair, the greatest poverty of all. And in that economy, friends, we are the rich ones. The ones who have lived to discover that to be human is to be beloved. Beloved by the Creator of the universe.

And either we believe it's the gospel that has been the difference or we don't. What we are doing here is not a game. We have not gathered to pacify ourselves about the rest of our selfish lives. We have gathered as people who know in our deepest selves and in our life together, that we are the beloved of God and that we have been sent into this world to share this news with our friends. All seven billion of them. We have gathered to rest, restock and receive new orders for this life we have in Christ. Those orders are here, in this text, as Jesus takes his leave of us, to do what we can never do.

What are those orders? Go. Be the beloved in this dangerous world. And don't expect it to be otherwise. Go, greet every person as a friend and love them like a brother or sister. But don't expect them to love and admire you all the time. Expect them to hate you, Jesus says, in his overhearing kind of way. Expect to have trouble. Expect to suffer. Expect to feel uncomfortable, awkward, out of place, left out and marginalized, like you are in a foreign country where all they eat is octopus. And when all that happens, do NOT whine like you've been mistreated; do NOT retreat like you are besieged by some enemy of the Lord. Because you haven't been. But rather, go. Go be like Jesus the best you can. Go be a good and helpful guest in this world. Go with the gospel in your pockets. Go, knowing, trusting, believing that, in the midst of all the ordinary human things that make your life a life – growing gardens and keeping houses; making babies or making a living – it's the delivery of hope which is your highest and best calling.

Peace/justice/mercy/grace in all we say and do, speaks more of Christ in us than a thousand Sunday sermons. This world is not our home, but all the same, here we are. May the world overhear the gospel in our lives and in our life together.