

ALL HAIL THE POWER

Text: John 17:1-11

If there ever was a Bible narrative that called for “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”, it’s this one.

The ascension was a significant moment in the disciples’ personal transformation and in the bringing of the gospel through the church. This singular event is related in more detail in both Luke and Acts, but I like the way John describes the beautiful prayer as Jesus lays out his love for his disciples and prays to his Father that they may be in unity and under divine protection.

The ascension had a profound impact on the disciples. Up to the moment that Jesus ascended into heaven, they seemed to be pretty puzzled, trying to figure it all out. And, I think we are puzzled a bit as well. The event seemed to catch the disciples off guard, and we often have the same reaction. Jesus told the disciples at the end of John 13 that he would soon leave them, and they were really disturbed. Yet, after the ascension, the disciples traveled back to Jerusalem with great joy.

Remember that he had kept his closest friends from the brink of utter despair by saying, “You are not losing me, but I am going to be with you in a different way through my Spirit”. I’m not sure that this really satisfied the disciples. They had not yet heard about the Holy Spirit (that doesn’t come until next Sunday.) Yet, his ascension event brought joy because the disciples realized what amazing benefits would come to them when Jesus returned to the Father. When Jesus ascended, all the promises regarding the Spirit’s ministry to the disciples were about to be fulfilled. The disciples accepted His ascension, because they had accepted Jesus’ word about the promised One to come. Their doubts and fears were gone. They were convinced of who he was. They knew he was alive. They trusted him. They knew it was not “good-bye”, but it was a promise to “see you again”. In his book *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions*, theologian Tim Keller says: I believe the story of the ascension is a crucial, if

often overlooked, aspect of the work of Christ. He continues by saying: Actually, it makes an enormous difference. The ascension, when understood, becomes an irreplaceable, important resource for living our lives in the world – and it's a resource no other religion or philosophy of life holds out to us.

Alleluia! All hail the power of Jesus' name.

So just what is Jesus imparting to his disciples – then and now – in his final speech? First of all, in this, Jesus farewell prayer, his speech is directed to God, but the message is for us all.

Jesus talks about what the relationship between himself and God entails. *Glorification* is a substantial part of it. Jesus looks up to heaven and says, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your son so that the Son may glorify you...I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.” We realize that believers had not yet received the spirit because Jesus had not yet been glorified. The arrival of the spirit in John is entirely dependent upon Jesus' death and resurrection, which are described in terms of coronation exaltation, and glorification. As Jesus says, “Father the hour has come”, we see the glory that started earlier in John's Gospel, which culminates in the passion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Alleluia! Let angles prostrate fall.

Here's the point: the glory of the Lord is God's presence. The incarnation, glory, love, father, mother, son, one, knowing – every last word declares that God created this world for the single purpose of unity with all of creation. Intimacy and unity. Jesus came to reveal that God's sole intention was to model that unity, to complete that unity. Jesus glorified God by completing the works God sent him to do.

The baton gets passed in the same way – as God gave the work of the world to Jesus, then Jesus passed it to believers who will carry on the great works of Jesus. Now

believers glorify God when they reveal God's love to the world God created and will love to the end.

Alleluia! Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of All.

Our story of the ascension is about knowledge and eternal life. We are often more familiar with eternal life as defined in Matthew or Revelation. But John has a different definition. It is not escaping fiery flames of hell or singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" with the cherubim and seraphim at some future glorious appointment. No, it's being in relationship with God and Christ, what John calls *knowing*, and it's available in its entirety now. When all is said and done, what deeper desire exists than to know and be truly known, to understand and be truly understood, to love and be truly loved? According to John, that's the meaning of life.

Allulia! Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransomed from the fall. Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all.

Our reading ends with what has been called the "high priestly prayer". In this prayer, Jesus speaks to his Father saying "*I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.*"

Here is where this passage speaks to us today – loud and clear. There's not much talk of ecumenism these days. Not in books. Not in blogs, not even in and among churches. Perhaps that is because there has been some progress in unity among the various denominations. Calvinists are far less suspicious of Catholics than they once were and vice versa. Methodists and Lutherans are now in full communion with one another. But our Methodist connection seems to have lost a good bit of its connectability. And Jesus' prayer is a stinging reminder of this continued disunity. What can and should be said about this obstinate, obvious reality? How do we approach this with urgency but not with despair? How do we search for answers for the gravity of our predicament, while facing it with words of hope?

As it was for the disciples, so too is it crucial for us today to return to Jesus' prayer, for it describes his hope, his vision, and his picture of what we, his followers, are to look like and how we are to live our lives together. It is very clear that his words are meant for everyone— then and now – as he prays for “those who will believe in me” through the words of the disciples.

It is a prayer for community. Jesus prays that “**all** may be one”. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a part of a greater whole. According to Jesus there are to be no solitary Christians or spiritual “Lone Rangers”.

Within that community the prayer is for unity. That all may be **one**. Does that mean that we all have to get along all the time? Does that mean we all have to agree **all** the time? If we think of this as a functional/political statement, it would seem to call for constant agreement and accord. But if we think more in existential terms, it becomes who we are. We are one in Christ whether we agree with each other or not. We are one in Christ whether we like one another or not. To become a part of Christ is to become a part of the community; a part of the one.

Jesus' prayer reminds us that our unity, our “oneness” is to be a sign to the world of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Oneness and unity is about love. And if you have been part of a family, a member of a church, or a community, you know that within that love there can be disagreements and squabbling. We are human. But the mystery of the incarnation is that God desired unity with us so much that God became one of us. And in that moment we were drawn into the oneness of God, the Creator/Father/Mother, the Son and the Spirit. It is with God's help that we can live into that oneness.

Alleluia! Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball, to him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of All. Amen.

