

Even for someone grounded in faith such as myself, the past ten days have been extremely challenging both emotionally and spiritually. On Wednesday the 17th, my father whom I adore, literally died during an eye procedure; his heart just quit beating. Thankfully the skilled professionals that were in the room with him, restarted his heart. He was placed on a ventilator in the Intensive Care Unit. His resurrection moment hung in the balance. With heavy but hopeful hearts we prayed for him to recover. But I admit, thoughts of the possibility of his dying crossed the minds of anyone who saw him. We wondered whether he would leave us for his next life.

Then came the news of the sudden death of our good friend Frank Britt. The news came out of the blue and was shocking to us all, most especially his wife June and his dear, close friends. We pray for him as he enters his next life.

Many of us grew up thinking and believing that eternal life was defined as that life that one begins at the moment of our death. When John F. Kennedy was buried his grave was marked with an eternal flame. It will burn perpetually and light up the future that lies before us. Eternal and eternity are words that both point beyond the present moment. That is why Jesus' words in our text this morning catch us a bit off guard.

In the Gospel reading for today, we hear Jesus praying to God. The reading is a portion of Jesus' Farewell Discourse with his Disciples. This section is referred to among scholars as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. The prayer can be divided into three parts in which he prays first on his own behalf, then on behalf of his disciples and at the end he prays for all who come to believe in him; for those who will make up the church established in his name. Today we hear from the first two sections of that Priestly Prayer.

In that first section, the section where he prays on his own behalf, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." And here is Jesus' definition of eternal life. Listen and see if you can identify how it differs from our own understanding of it. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Hmmm. There is no mention of dying in that prayer. The operative verb there is "know." That's K-N-O-W. Eternal life, according to Jesus' prayer in John's Gospel means knowing God and Christ. We know God as Jesus revealed God to us in his life and ministry. Perhaps we are to be encouraged here to know God through Christ now. Perhaps knowing God now can guide all that we do so that the life that we live right here, right now becomes our eternal life; one that continues beyond our earthly life but begins right here.

There is more evidence in this prayer that this is what the author of this gospel meant. Remember, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come." All through this gospel there are references to that final hour. Anticipation of that final hour fills the chapters. But this statement that appears at the end of Jesus' Farewell Discourse is the bookend to the statement that appears near the beginning of it. You might recall that in the second chapter, Jesus' mother Mary asks Jesus to replenish the wine that has run out at the wedding in Cana. Do you recall what Jesus said in response to his mother's request? He told her that his hour had not yet come. Jesus' life and ministry are described in between those bookends. Perhaps John's Gospel is

pointing us to see that our own eternal life should be defined by moments that are compatible with the life and ministry that Jesus lived. Could this be the way that Jesus wanted us to glorify God? After all, he said in this prayer, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do." The question for us is, have we finished the work that God gave us to do?

How can each of us know the work that God gave us to do? What are the specific gifts that he gave us? What if I'm stuck doing something other than what God had in mind? I believe those questions can only be answered by being open to believing that God is constantly active in our world; constantly yearning for us to know him; always inviting us to see his work and hear his call to us. What we need to do is to make time to settle down, get quiet and listen. I invite you to try stilling yourself for ten minutes each day, then maybe work up to twenty minutes. You can use words to communicate with God or just quietly sit in His presence. If you need to, repeat a word or a phrase to keep yourself centered - like Yahweh or Lord, have mercy. I think you'll be amazed at how that simple activity can liberate your soul and connect it with God. I've done this and it has worked for me.

I believe that when Jesus announced that his hour had come, by transference he was signaling that the hour had come for the disciples, too. Jesus announced that he would be leaving this physical earth but that he would be remaining in their hearts as their shepherd, their rabbi, forever. Jesus coming departure meant that the hour had come when the disciples would need to assume Jesus' work in the world. I believe that hour has come for us, too.

Here at St. John's, many people do many things to glorify God by offering themselves in service to their neighbor. But more remains to be done, especially now. I say especially because I believe that the signs are all pointing to seismic changes in our world. I recently discovered a book by Tom Friedman titled Thank You For Being Late - An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations. In it he points out the amazing advances that we have seen in this age especially in science, technology and medicine. Those advances have led to dramatic positive efficiencies and even wealth with counterbalancing dramatic declines in our debt levels, our personal relationships and our earth's atmosphere. We are caught up in dizzying schedules trying to take advantage of every single opportunity to advance ourselves or our children. We have reached a tipping point. It is ours to choose whether to continue to burn both ends of our candles or to gain or regain some semblance of calm and comfort.

Like all of us, Jesus was a busy guy. He accomplished a lot in his life. If we were to learn one thing from the text this morning it is that Jesus shows us a way to live that frees us to be all that God wants us to be no matter who we are or where we live; frees us to enjoy eternal life with God right here and right now. No matter what job, education, career path, or political ideology you choose you can be all that God calls you to be. All we need to do is to allot time to know, love and serve God and to know, love and serve each other.

That is what Jesus meant when he says in that second part of his prayer, "Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one." Friends, we are those that God gave to Jesus. All people have access to God's grace through Christ and the Holy Spirit whether they call them by those names or not.

The Holy Three, as we know them, were understood by the very early theologians to be engaged together in a divine dance flowing into and out of each other. In that way, we can be engaged, too, with the Holy Three and they can be engaged with us.

I pray that whatever you do in this your eternal life that you do it knowing God. In that way, you glorify him and your soul will be satisfied, too.