

A Homiletical Treatment of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17)

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Why a homiletical series on John, chapter seventeen? If you have ever preached from any of these pericope series: Saxon, Ranke, Nitsch, Owens, Swedish, Lenski, Synodical Conference, or the ILCW, then you have preached on a text from John 17 (see appendix A). Outwardly this chapter has the appearance of an easy text with its simple Greek of John's style. Inwardly however, this chapter rivals the mystery of the Trinity, the dual nature of the doctrine of Election, and the Law-Gospel antithesis in profundity and majesty. There is so much packed into so few words! This makes John, chapter seventeen, a challenge to treat homiletically.

How can a preacher expound and apply such words to his people with the clarity in which Jesus first spoke the words? The more one prays over the text, studies, meditates and applies it to his own life, the more he realizes he is only scratching the surface of the wonderful truths contained here. Somewhere Luther is supposed to have written of this chapter:

It is truly a fervent and sincere prayer in which he [Jesus] opens and pours out His soul to us and His heavenly Father. Put I fear that we can not properly estimate and describe the power, the characteristic quality, and the virtue of this prayer; for however simple and unadorned, it is nevertheless impossible to fathom its profound significance, its wealth and its compass.

(This humble homiletician agrees wholeheartedly.)

This prayer of Jesus is the longest continual prayer found in the Gospels. It allows man to drop in on a conversation between the persons of the Godhead concerning our wellbeing and future. Melancthon wrote, "No worthier, no holier, no more blessed or exalted voice has ever been heard in heaven or on earth than this petition of the Son of God himself." Jesus, nearing the final depths of his humiliation and shame, opens and pours out his soul to his heavenly Father, and to his eleven disciples who listened to Jesus pray this out loud - no doubt for their benefit and by means of the miracle of inspiration for our benefit.

This prayer is the climax of Jesus, final discourse to his disciples and the Church. It is a summary and a cover over his entire redemptive work on earth, much like the fine embroidered veil placed over the communion ware on our altars. Jesus makes it known that he enters his "defeat" on the cross as a victor. He the final outcome of his work as successfully completed, thereby giving the faithful disciple the certainty of eternal life through Christ.

This prayer helps the lonely sinner to know that he has a personal Savior who prays for him, and that sinner is comforted to know that the prayer is answered. Jesus becomes real and personal to the one who contemplates the meaning of these words. Jesus is our great High Priest who knows by experience our worst problems and sorrows and therefore earnestly intercedes for our most dire needs: forgiveness, life, reconciliation to God, unity with one another and final glorification with himself in heaven. No mere man could have uttered such a powerful prayer. "Its serenity, its majesty, its authority befit only the heart and lips of him who is the Son."ⁱ

The fact that 10 of 15 pericope series include portions of John 17 in their sermon texts indicates that this is a worthy portion of Scripture for a parish pastor to wrestle with, to expound and to apply to himself and his people. The task is not easy, as I have found, but the rewards to himself and to his people will be great. Let us, therefore, apply ourselves to the task and search for ways to proclaim the mighty truths of John 17 to God's precious saints under our care. I hope that what follows will excite and incite some of you to consider a series of sermons on Jesus' Sacerdotal Prayer.

Larger Context

In John's presentation of Jesus, final hours before his death, chapter 17 comes at the end, like a final prayer and benediction which closes a worship service. The larger context begins in chapter 13: "Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave them and go back to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love...Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" (John 13:1,3).

Jesus loved his disciples and showed them to what extent. John presents this in chapters 13-16 by means of the foot washing, the institution of the Lord's Supper and the farewell address which contained comfort, assurance, warnings, admonition to sanctified living and promises of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had selected 12 men from all his followers and commissioned them to be sent out into an angry hostile, unbelieving and sinful world to make more disciples. These men and those who would be brought to faith by their words were foremost on Jesus, mind during those short-lived hours before his death. He wants the best for them and does not want to lose any of them.

Immediate Context

"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:32,33). With these words Jesus concludes his farewell discourse. He ends on a high note, one of victory, "I have overcome the world." Jesus knew he would finish his work and defeat Satan and the unbelieving world. The disciples, on the other hand, could not be so certain—hence the prophecy that they would be scattered, leaving Jesus alone. But Jesus will not be detracted from his mission by them. There is no anxiety about his own outcome for he trusts in the person of his Father. There is anxiety for his disciples. Therefore, he tells them "these things" so that they may have peace and comfort. We are impressed by the selflessness of Jesus in this situation. He dwells not on his own impending agony and pain, he pours out his concern for his weak disciples and for us today. We should not marvel then that he prays out loud a prayer which is not solely for his benefit but primarily for ours.

Verses 1, 2

"This Jesus spoke, and while lifting up his eyes to heaven he said, "Father the hour has come. Glorify your Son, in order that the Son may glorify you; seeing that you gave him authority over all people to give life to all those you have given him."

It is clear that what follows is a prayer from Jesus addressed to the *Pa*te/*r*. Praying was a regular pastime of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Other examples of prayers Jesus addressed to his Father are Matt. 11:25ff.; John 11:41ff. and John 12:28ff. Jesus' posture of holding his hands heavenward shows us to whom he directed his prayer (to God, the father) and his confidence of receiving the answer. It is an intense and sincere prayer.

It was David Chytraeus, a disciple of Melancthon who supposedly first named this prayer, "Jesus' Sacerdotal Prayer." Jesus here is performing a function of a priest: interceding for God's people. It would be appropriate in expounding this text to explain Jesus' office as the Great High Priest. Key passages to consider would be Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 2:17; 4:14-5:10; 7:11-28; 8:1-6; 9:11-15, 24-28. Key truths to present would be:

- 1) Jesus is like the Old Testament priests but also different. He is “after the order of Melchizedek.”
- 2) Jesus can sympathize with man and therefore be the best intercessor for him because he is a man like them who was subject to temptation.
- 3) Since he came from the tribe of Judah and not Levi, Jesus is a new order of a priest, therefore setting aside the old covenant (Sinai) and establishing a new (Gospel).
- 4) Jesus lives forever and thus is a priest for all sinners permanently.
- 5) Jesus was without sin and needed not to offer a sacrifice for his sin. He offered a one-time sacrifice for the sin of all people for all times. That sacrifice was his own life. (both priest and victim)
- 6) Jesus enters the heavenly holy of holies (presence of God in heaven) to turn away his righteous anger against our sins. He presents his perfect righteousness and his death as the basis of intercession on our behalf.

Jesus’ work as a high priest must be understood in order to follow Jesus’ line of thought in the prayer. It is assuring to know that someone really cares about what happens to us in this life and in the afterlife. It is assuring to know that every time we sin, even before we are brought to repentance, Jesus is already asking God to put away our sin for his sake. It is assuring to know that our human brother, who can empathize with our problems and sorrow and weaknesses is interceding for us. He can best ask the Father for what we need most. And it is assuring to know that because Jesus really did rise from death that he truly, even now and always, is interceding for us. This makes this a good text to follow up the Easter message.

Patēr, “Father.” Six times Jesus addresses the “Father.” That he is speaking to his *own real* Father is clear from his words that he had glory with the Father before the world began (v.5), that all he has is the Father’s and all that the Father has is his (v. 10), that he and the Father are one (vs. vs. 11, 21, 22, 23), that he was sent by the Father into the world (v. 18), and that the Father loves him (v. 26). This is the monogenēs υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς who speaks as an obedient son in whom the Father is well pleased. The divine sonship of Jesus is a regularly occurring theme in John’s writings and it reaches a climax in this prayer.

Jesus announces to the Father that “the hour has come.” Throughout his ministry, Jesus on occasion had said that his hour was not yet come. But after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem he announces to his disciples, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (Jn. 12:23). They thought it meant the establishment of his kingdom in Jerusalem. Jesus knew it meant his death. In his human nature, Jesus dreaded this hour with horror and fright, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!” (John 12:27, 28). Jesus would die with all the world’s sin and guilt on him and be crushed by its weight. Yet he willingly accepts it as the obedient Son. Because of what follows it is clear that we can not limit “The Hour” to only Jesus’ suffering, death and burial, but we must also include the vivification, resurrection, ascension and glorification. Jesus in his divine nature could thus speak with such confidence and this becomes the basis for his first request.

δοξασόν σου τοῦ υἱοῦ, “Glorify your Son...” “Glory” is a key word in this chapter (cf. 17:2, 4, 5, 22, 24). A good word study on it is found in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Kittel, Vol. II, p. 233ff. It comes from the root δόκε/w, but in the New Testament it takes on its own unique meaning and portrays the divine and heavenly radiance, the loftiness and the majesty of God. In the Old Testament we find the expression ἡδωκῆ: δωῆ; , “the Glory of the Lord,” especially during God’s dealings with Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. August Pieper’s essay “The Glory of the Lord” is, in my opinion, an excellent treatise on the meaning and significance of this important theological concept. It plays a key role in Jesus’ High Priestly prayer.

There are various definitions given for δόξα.

This term is constantly used wither to designate all the attribute's of the Godhead as they shine forth in one or another way before the eyes of men, or to indicate the manifestation of any one or of several of the attributes.ⁱⁱ

The radiance of his grace and the majesty of his truth manifested in all his works and words, the attributes of deity shining through the veil of his [Jesus] human nature.ⁱⁱⁱ

The concept of the glory of God, occurring with such frequency in Scriptures is so broad that it sums up all the perfection of his essence and confronts everything created with his absolute transcendence as an inducement for adoration and as its object.^{iv}

The direct, naked glory of God as the perfection of his essence, no man can see, but God permits man (as in the case with Moses, Ex. 33:20) to indirectly view it through his revelations. God's glory is best revealed to us in his grace and goodness by which "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and compassion on whom he will have compassion" (Ex. 33:19). So, in the great deeds of God as He intervenes in man's history to bless them with his providence protection and salvation, we see God's glory manifested.

In his High Priestly Prayer Jesus makes a request for two acts of glorification: A) that the Father glorify the Son with the glory he had with the Father before the world began; B) that the Son glorify the Father by completing the work the Father gave him to do.

A. In a sermon on these first five verses the preacher has a good opportunity to instruct, his people on mystery of the dual nature of Christ and on Jesus' states of humiliation and exaltation. As this text could be in a post-Easter series, the preacher could call on the clear distinction between Jesus' humiliation displayed in the passion scenes, and his exaltation displayed in his resurrection, ascension and sitting on God's Right Hand which are the themes of post-Easter. Tying these paradoxical states of Jesus together would be the work of redemption and its successful completion at the cross and at the empty tomb.

In expounding on the two natures of Christ the preacher could utilize other key passages in John. "The word became flesh (incarnation) and lived for a while among us (Jesus' humiliation-not using his divine attributes or showing his glory but living as a man subject to all human limitations). We have seen glory (at his baptism, Jn. 2:11ff, the Mt. of Transfiguration, Jn. 12:28, the voice from heaven), the glory of the only begotten Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). The stumbling block to the Jews was that Jesus' state of humiliation was contrary to their concept of the glory of the Christ. It remains so today when people regard Jesus as only a great religious man. The preacher will, therefore, carefully and simply set forth this basic truth of the person of Jesus:

Christ truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men; therefore He exercised this majesty, not always, but when [as often as) it pleased Him, until after His resurrection He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the [human] nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty and thus entered into His glory.^v

In John 17:1 we understand Jesus to be requesting that having completed the work of redemption, the full radiance of his divine attributes now be displayed. Jesus prays that He as the God-Man may now be restored to the fullness of glory with the unlimited use and enjoyment of the attributes of the divine Godhead. The resurrection, ascension and the witness of the apostles (Philippians 2:9ff.) verify that the Father answered this prayer of His Son.

B. "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (vs. 4). Jesus was not thinking only of himself here. He prays that by his Father glorifying him, he may also glorify the Father before all men. In Jesus, his incarnation, his ministry in words and miracles, his disciples and his contemporaries saw the Father's glory manifested. Now the hour has come (suffering, death, resurrection) for Jesus to glorify the

Father by exercising the authority which the Father had granted him, namely to confer eternal life on those whom the Father has given him. This required, of course, that the God-man be first humiliated beyond human comprehension, but by so doing the glory of God's grace stuck out for us to see and believe. After Jesus' exaltation he fully exercised this authority (Matthew 28:18) over all flesh [A Hebraism meaning "all people"] and now gives eternal life to all who believe in him. This is Jesus' mission to bring life to spiritually dead sinners (John 10:10; 11:25), and this life is something he gives away requiring no preconditions or payments on man's part.

πα~ν ο\$ δε/δωκav αυ) τω|, "everything which you gave him..." (vs. 2). This phrase presents a difficulty for translation, both due to the neuter case and to the lack of a predicate. The neuter can refer to the entire mass of those who finally receive eternal life. John 6:37-40 is a good commentary on this phrase. There are people "who look to the Son and believe in him. They shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day (John 6:40)."

We are introduced to another subject that is treated elsewhere in the chapter—the elect of God (vss. 6,9,12,24). For the believer this is a most comforting doctrine because it guarantees that God by grace chose us already before the foundation of the world to be saved from sin and thus to life forever in heaven. The Father was determined to entrust the elect's eternal fate to the hands of his Son. It would be up to the Christ to carry the Father's plan to completion. In our text, Jesus is announcing that he is about to successfully complete that work and therefore prays that he thus may glorify the Father and that the Father glorify him. The preacher has a good opportunity to strengthen his hearers' certainty about their own salvation.

Verses 3-5

"This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and the One whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory which I had with you before the world existed."

αυ3th δε/ ε0stin η9 αι0ω&νιοv zwh&, "This is eternal life..." Jesus is not defining eternal life, but he is explaining what it means to possess eternal life and how it is expressed in those who have it. The article before αι0ω&νιοv zwh& means "the eternal life I am talking about, the only genuine eternal life—this is what it consists of..." Every religion of the world has this in common that it searches for a way to live forever in bliss and happiness apart from evil. Only, in the case of most, this final goal is sought apart from the true God and apart from a divine Savior from sin. Their hope, therefore, remains an empty one. Jesus on the other hand clarifies of what true life consists.

ι3να γινω&σκωsin, "that they know..." The ι3να introduces a non-final clause and is not to be understood in the sense of purpose. It explains the αυ3th. I prefer not to introduce the subjunctive flavor of the verb into the translation as the KJV, NASB and NIV do, "They may know." I suggest along with Beck, RSV, and TEV, "That they know..." because it emphasizes the certainty Jesus wants the believer to have in regard to the possession of eternal life.

The word γινω&σκω plays an important role in John's writings. (See *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Kittel, Vol. I, p. 711) It describes a relationship that intimately ties two beings together, as when the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father (Matthew 11 :27). Jesus as the Good Shepherd *knows* his sheep (the believers). This is the personal experiential knowing that we find between a husband and wife celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. In the case of our knowing God, it means not a theoretic intellectual comprehension or to merely have information about God, but to have a personal, living discernment of God and Christ and an understanding of who they are, how they united, and how they have worked together for our Salvation.

To know the only true God and the one whom He has sent, Jesus Christ is tantamount to saying "I believe and confess that the Triune God of the Scriptures is the only true God—all other man made gods are nothing—and that Jesus is "the divine Son of God and the Christ who has delivered me from eternal death."

Knowing = Believing = Eternal Life. Isn't this the meaning of John's statement in John 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name?" The believer's sole goal in life should be that of Paul (Phil. 3:7-10), to get to know Jesus better, that is, to believe in him more and more as one who dwells in us through the preaching of the Gospel. As we believe, we already here in this life begin to enjoy the happiness and bliss of eternal life and therefore give glory and adoration to God. So Jesus does glorify the Father by bringing to sinners a right knowledge of the Father which brings them to faith.

Jesus began to bring this knowledge of God to sinners as he taught and performed miracles. Now, he realizes he will soon have perfected his work, although it meant the cross for him. This too would bring glory to the Father as those, whom the cross serves, gaze at it in faith and praise the grace and love of God. While the completion of Jesus' work was for the benefit of our redemption, it has a higher purpose of also glorifying the Father. Jesus views this work and the impending cross not as a burden, but as a loving gift to; him from the Father (Lenski).

Verse 5 has been treated under the comments made on verse 1 concerning the glorifying of the Son by the Father and the Father by the Son. We note in verses 4 and 5 Jesus changes from the third person (as in verses 1 and 2) to the first person. He began by emphasizing to the disciples and us the Father-Son relationship he has with God, and then he demonstrates the personal relationship that exists between him and the Father as these two persons of the Trinity communicate to each other.

One more comment could be made on this first section (vss. 1-5). In the case of the elect (the true believers), their adoration and giving glory to God is something they are lead to do and not forced) as will be in the case of the unbelievers on the Last Day. Jesus came to reveal his Father's attributes (i.e., mercy, love, grace, patience, justice, etc.) by his teachings, to reveal His power by his miracles, and to reveal his plan for saving us by his atoning act of obedience to the law and by laying down his life for all. This was so that men would hear the words, see the deeds and believe and worship the Father. Though the work of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, it surely is included, as Jesus made clear earlier in his discourse (Jn. 14,15,16).

Verses 6-8

"I made known your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours, you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything which you gave me is from you. For the sayings which you gave to me, I have given to them, and they received [them]. They know for certain that I came from your presence, and they believed that you sent me."

This text enables the preacher to make use of appropriation. It is specifically about those who were present with Jesus when he spoke this prayer. That would be the eleven apostles (Judas has left by now and verse 12 shows he is not included.). We learn how precious these men were to Jesus. They were his family and his chosen ones who were to carry on the ministry he began. Jesus' mission and its final success is wrapped up in these men, for Jesus' mission will not be totally complete until *all* the elect are made one. After Jesus leaves he will gather the elect through the work of his apostles who will preach the Gospel and record the New Testament. Jesus has these man on hie mind even though he has problems of his own to face. Contrast this with human friendship which so often shows concern for others when it's convenient and it has time. We learn here what it means to sing "What a Friend we have in Jesus!"

In verse 9 Jesus declares that he is making a request for these disciples, but before he asks the requests he explains why he is praying for them. While Jesus speaks specifically of the eleven, the preacher will want to show how the same feelings and requests Jesus has for them, he has for all his true disciples of all times. Herein lies the comfort of this section for the hearer.

οὐ φανεῖται σου τὸ ὄνομα, “I made known *your name*...” The “name of God” is more than just a “handle” by which we can speak of God. Throughout Scripture it refers to the insight one has into the nature of God and his doings. The “name of God” as used here is the *ὄνομα* in verse 6 (“They have kept your word) and the *ῥήματα* in verse 7 (“The sayings which you gave me.”). The new exposition of Luther’s Catechism by Professor Kuske uses verses 6-8 to explain the meaning of the term “name of God” in the second commandment. He explains it as “God’s name is everything God has revealed to us about himself in his word.”^{vi}

Jesus is the foremost exegete of the Father’s name. Jesus told the crowds, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt. 11 :21)” (see also John 1:18). The Gospel of John also demonstrates Jesus’ identification with the Old Testament name for God, *יהוה*, with the many “I am” sayings and especially in John 8:58 where Jesus claims the name of *Jahwe* as his own. Jesus patiently instructed his chosen disciples about the true nature of God. He manifested, made known, showed (*εὐφανεῖται*) them what the feelings and intention of the Father is toward sinful man. The result of Jesus’ work of manifesting his Father to the disciples is demonstrated by the effect it had on them (verses 7, 8).

Here, in Jesus’ own words, we hear of the importance and necessity of the Word, whether it is the *ῥήματα* (“sayings of God”) or the *ὄνομα* *θεοῦ*. This “Word” was human language! We have received the “Word” through written human language—the inspired Scriptures. Yet today a maliciously deceptive phrase is heard among many Christians, “I believe in Jesus, not in a book. I worship Jesus, not a book.” But without “that book” we can never know Jesus, or God the Father or eternal life. Consider emphasizing this truth if you preach on these verses.

οὓς ἐξέλεξεν, “those whom you gave me out of the world...” The comments made on verse 2 apply here concerning those elected by God and entrusted to Jesus’ care. Here, however, we have the choosing of men for a special purpose in God’s plans—those who will be sent out (*ἀποστόλων*). These apostles would play a key role in the spread and preservation of the Gospel; hence we can understand why Jesus speaks with concern for them in this prayer. They have been consecrated by God for a special task (see in 17:16-19). The reason they were chosen above the many other followers of Jesus at the time can only be answered with: “God’s grace!” These eleven men (excluding Judas) were the least likely men in human estimation to be the “apostles.” They were weak, sinful, ignorant, unlearned, ordinary, spiritually immature, not eloquent speakers nor intellectual leaders. They knew this too, which was probably why they were especially troubled on this night of Jesus’ departure.

For their benefit Jesus remarks in his prayer what effect his words have had in their hearts and why he is now making a special request for them.

- A. They have “kept the Father’s word.” (*θηρεῖτε* - guard, keep safely in one’s possession.)
 1. They refused to let that word be snatched from them by doubts or by fear of men. (Most of the other followers of Jesus had.)
 2. They did not violate it in their lives. (John 14:15,23)
 3. They would not let anyone tamper with it. Note: I think here of Luther’s explanation to the 1st petition; an excellent commentary on “keeping God’s Word.”
- B. They “received the word” (*ἐλάβον* vs. 8) - the acceptance of faith worked in them by the Holy Spirit.
- C. They “know and believe that Jesus’ words and works were not his own but that he was working directly for the Father and that he came from the Father. Therefore their confession: John 16:30 “This makes us believe that you came from God.” and Mt. 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Lest there be misunderstanding, it must be pointed out that the disciples were not perfect, for in a few hours from the time Jesus spoke this prayer, even though they were strengthened by these final words of Jesus, nevertheless) they all forsook Jesus and fled to hide behind barred doors. Jesus knew that, but as their High Priest, Jesus describes them and defends them as ones who have kept the Word. (“Love covers over a multitude of sin.”) In Jesus’ case however, he *can* present them as “justified saints” because of his atoning work which he was about to complete. The fact that the disciples heard such love towards them expressed by Jesus makes us marvel that they could so quickly deny him. But are we any different?

In these disciples and in the way Jesus regards them, we have a good description of a true believer in Christ. “To accept the Word of God, to cling to the promises and statements of the Gospel, that is the characteristic attitude and work of the believers.”^{vii}

Verses 9-11

“I am making a request for them. I am not making the request for the world but for those whom you gave to me because they are yours, (Everything of mine is yours and yours, mine) and I have been glorified in them. I, on the one hand, will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world. I am coming to you.”

ε0gw_ . . . ε0rwtw~, “I am asking for them...” The ε0gw& is for emphasis. We have here another mark of the high priestly function of making a personal intercession for his people. It is true that Jesus prays for all people, unbelievers included (Lk. 23:34, Mt. 5:41), but here he has a special interest in those who belong to the Father and to him. This personal concern of Jesus for his disciples is a comforting thought from the text which should not be overlooked when preaching on it. We also learn here how distinctly different the disciples of Jesus are from the world.

“Everything of mine is your and yours, mine.” This also explains Jesus’ concern and request for his disciples. They are now jointly owned by both the Father and the Son. The Father and Son are one and so also their care of their possessions, in this case, the disciples, is also of one mind. Luther’s comment here is worthy to note:

This no creature can say before God. For you must understand this not only of that which the Father has given Him on earth, but also of His one divine essence with the Father. For he speaks not only of His disciples and Christians, but comprehends in one heap all that is the Father’s, eternal, almighty essence, life, truth, righteousness, etc., that is, He confesses freely that He is true God, for the word “All that is Thine is Mine” permits nothing to be excluded. If everything is His, then also the eternal Godhead is His; otherwise He cannot and dare not use the word “all.”^{viii}

dedo&casqai ε0n au0toi=v, “I have been glorified in them...” This is the fifth reason why Jesus makes a special request for the disciples. The disciples believed Jesus came from the Father, and so he was made great in their hearts. In this way Jesus was glorified. The final salvation of every believer also glorifies Jesus as it testifies that he successfully carried out his Father’s will and completed the work of redemption. “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.” (vs. 11) This is a transition statement which states the final reason why Jesus is making a special prayer for the disciples. It also introduces his first request. κο&σμοv is here likely to stand for the unbelieving world which is hostile to Christ and his followers. They present many dangers to the spiritual safety of Christ’s followers (see John 17:14; 15:18-25; 1 John 2:15-17). The disciples must go on and struggle against sin and Satan and the hostility of man’s fallen nature as they carry on Jesus’ ministry of the Gospel. As the High Priest, Jesus is concerned that none of them be lost.

Verses 11-12

“Holy Father, keep them in your name which you gave me in order that they may be one as we are. When I was with them I was keeping them in your name which you gave me. I did protect [them] and none of them was lost, other than that lost one, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Jesus now makes the first request for his disciples. He prays for their preservation in an unbelieving, hostile world. He knows the world and its dangers because he came into the world and took to himself a human nature. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he is the High Priest who has been tempted in every way as we are yet without sin (Heb. 4:15; 2:17,18). He realizes that if these disciples are left unwatched and unguarded, they will begin to depend on their own resources and will quickly be enticed into error and lead astray.

Pa&ter a#gie, “Holy Father...” Such an address indicates that an important request is to follow. Here is the second use of the vocative and it marks the second major request in his high priestly prayer. This time he adds the modifier a#gie. It is appropriate because he will now speak about being kept separate from the profane and set apart for a sacred use (consecrated). God is holy (Lev. 19:1), separate from all sin and opposed to all unbelief and disobedience to the Law. It follows then that those who are kept in his name will thus be preserved from contamination from the world. Man’s problem is that he’s not all that opposed to a little contamination from the world. So without divine intervention, man is swallowed up by the world.

“Keep them in your name.” God must keep the believer in the one true faith by the Word of his Truth which reveals his name. Jesus had given this name to the disciples and it had had the desired effect on them (cf. vss. 6-8). God’s Word was taught by them in its truth and purity and they led a holy life according to it. We pray for the same thing in the first petition (“Hallowed by thy name”). This is why we Lutherans lay such a heavy stress on the means of Grace, for only through them can we be guarded from the unbelief and corruption of the world. This truth ought to be included in a sermon on those verses, for our dear Lord himself is praying for it on our behalf.

Previously it was not necessary for Jesus to pray this because he himself had been watching over (note imperfect tense e0th/roun) them as he had already pointed out (vs. 6). He was like the good shepherd who alertly guarded the flock from danger and harm. His warnings, rebukes, encouragements and assuring words, as well as his divine miracles, had been like a force field around his disciples. The aorist e0fu/laca and Jesus’ report, “None of them was lost” show that Jesus had in fact succeeded in keeping safe those whom God had given him. A common fear among even faithful Christians is “Will I remain a believer? What if I fall away and go to hell?” Here in these verses the preacher can bring the comfort that the believer’s preservation in faith is assured by Jesus.

i3na w}sin e4n, “in order that they be one...” Here is the purpose and goal for Jesus’ prayer for the preservation of his disciples and us. Jesus introduces a thought that he will develop more fully later in the prayer (vss.21-23). This passage is popular with those who practice “eisegesis” because it seems to say what they need in order to defend their theology. I am referring to the fervent disciples of church union between all Christian denominations. Jesus is not saying that someday there might be one mammoth Christian denomination, “The United Church For Open-Minded, Accepting People And Christians.” We can not deny that the passage says Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples and does not want disunity among them, but paying attention to the text and context explains exactly what he means.

The preacher who is preaching a series on John 17 might consider waiting until he expounds on verses 20-23 to fully develop the Lord’s thoughts on unity. One thing I would like to note here is that the w}sin is a present subjunctive, and this stresses the continuance of a situation that already existed. The sense would be “That they keep on being one just as they have been through my work of giving them your name. Now that you, Father, will continue to keep them in your word, they will continue to be one.”

The modern day ecumenical Church-unity movement can find no support in this verse. The unity Jesus speaks about is modeled after the essential unity between the divine persons of the Trinity (καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ἦν μετὰ τὸν πατέρα). While such divine unity could not be duplicated among believers, it can be imitated, and is as the Word is in them and joins them as one. When that “Word” is removed or corrupted, there no longer is unity. The disciples will and did express this unity in their mutual cooperation, agreement of purpose and action and their bond of love and fellowship. This will be necessary as they perform the ministry for which they are being consecrated, namely, that they present a united front and voice to the world. Jesus had previously shown the foolishness of disunity in any joint effort, “Every Kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand (Mt. 12:25).”

The disciples will need to be united in order to be preserved from the world. This would be an important truth to be used in applications in a sermon. There are many passages in the New Testament which admonish the Christian to fellowship, express unity with others and to give mutual encouragement and support to fellow brothers and sisters in the faith. (Heb. 10:24,25; Gal. 6; Eph 5:19ff, Col. 3:15ff.; 1 Cor. 1:10ff)

εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπολλείας, “other than the Son of Perdition...” Let the preacher be careful that he explains this well lest the hearer get the impression that Jesus was not completely successful in preserving his disciples in the faith since he slipped up and lost one. That would lead to the calvinistic thinking, “What if God has decided that I won’t be saved?”

The “Son of Perdition” is a Hebraism which is “often used to denote the relationship which determines the nature of the man, and the term which follows it often replaces the adjective.”^{ix} The identical phrase is used for the “Man of Lawlessness” in 2 Thes. 2:3. I dislike the translations in the NIV: “one doomed to destruction,” the TEV: “the man who was bound to be lost,” and the *Jerusalem Bible*: “the one who chose to be lost.” They imply that Judas received the eternal decree from God that he was to be lost.

In his comments on this verse Lenski comes close to agreeing with Calvinism, “Not that Judas never believed- we may be quite sure that he did at first; but even then he was “the son of perdition,” a son or product of eternal damnation ...For Judas is not given this awful title because he went to perdition and thus *ex eventu* became a son of perdition. The reverse is true: being a son of perdition, he went to perdition, “fell away, that he might go to his own place (Acts 1:25).”^x I disagree. Judas became a son of perdition because he rejected Christ and resisted his attempts to persuade him not to go through with his plan. That he was not one of God’s elect is true, but by no fault of God. Jesus knew Judas would fall and betray him because it was foretold (Ps. 41:10; Jn. 13:18), but this was not the cause of Judas being lost.

Of the different translations of this verse, I prefer the one in Beck’s translation: “that lost one.” The fact that Judas was chosen to be a disciple and fell away is a strong warning to our hearers, one which the preacher should use as one of the few law passages in Jesus’ prayer. He fell away because he turned away from the Word and listened instead to Satan and to his sinful flesh (greed, pride). “With reward he got for his wickedness...” (Acts 1:18). “Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs” (Acts 1:24,25).

Verses 13-16

“Now I am coming to you, and these things I am speaking in the world in order that they may have my joy made full in themselves. I have given your word to them, and the world hated them because they are not from the world as I am not from the world. I am not asking that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the Evil One. They are not from the world as I am not from the world.”

Verse 13 is a transition statement that serves as a closing statement for Jesus, first request concerning the disciples and as an opening statement for Jesus’ second request. For this reason it may be hard to decide where to make a homiletical division unless one preaches on the entire section of vss. 6-19. The chief benefit of

this verse is for the disciples. Remember Jesus is speaking the prayer in their presence and here specifically for their good. Though the hour for Jesus' departure was at hand, he wants to leave his disciples joy instead of sorrow.

ἵνα εἰπάωσιν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ, “that they may have my joy...” Repeatedly in his last discourses Jesus had soothed, comforted and reassured his confused, doubting and troubled disciples. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn. 14:27). “I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and they your joy may be complete” (Jn. 15:11). “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy... Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (Jn. 16:20-22). As the disciples remain in the world amidst sin, they are to work with the same joy that filled Jesus' heart as he did his Father's work.

I like the comments of Kretzmann and Luther on verse 13. Both of these would have a good place in a sermon either as a quote or a paraphrase:

His (Jesus) urgent prayer for their preservation in the faith should give them the assurance, as it should to the believers of all times, that nothing is left undone which will assist them in the midst of all the perils of the world and their own flesh. That is a source of wonderful comfort to the believers that gives them the fullness of joy. Theirs, then, is a joy in Christ; they are happy over the fact that they are Christian, that they are intimates of the Father. This joy must drive out every bit of doubt as to a person's remaining in faith to the end, just as this entire section of Christ's prayer contains nothing but comfort for every Christian.^{xi}

Now if some one wants to know whether he is elected or in what relation he stands to God, let him but look upon the mouth of Jesus, that is, upon these and similar verses. For though a person cannot say of a certainty who will be elected in the future and remain to the end, yet this is certainly true, that whoever is called and comes thereto, namely, to hear this revelation, that is, the Word of Christ, provided he accept it in all sincerity, that is, fully hold and believe that it is true, they are the ones that are given to Christ by the Father. But those that are given to Him He will surely keep, and insist that they do not perish.^{xii}

“I have given them your word.” It's natural that having talked about preservation in the faith and unity and being filled with joy, Jesus again mentions he has given the disciples his word. The disciples would learn from this prayer of Jesus the value Jesus puts on God's Word. It is clear that Jesus is speaking about the revelation of God to man through human language. Of course such inspired words from God meets opposition from the world which chooses to listen to the lies of Satan.

ὁ κόσμος ἐμίσησεν αὐτοῦ, “the world hated them.” “The world” as used here means the unbelieving mankind who opposes God and his truth. While keeping the word brings joy it also makes the disciple hated by the world. Jesus had explained this in detail already in Jn. 15:18-25. The reason the world hates the Word is because it reveals their sin, makes them feel guilty, and attacks their self-righteous pride. Hence, Jesus who brought the Word of God to the world is hated by the world and those who follow Jesus are hated. God foretold this enmity between the unbelievers and believers in Genesis 3:15.

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world...” The disciples, as well as Christians today would be saved much grief and sorrow if God would remove them from the world, but Jesus knows that this would not complete his Father's will. The disciples have a task to perform. They have been set apart (ἀγιῶσθε, vs. 17) for a special task and it must be done in the world. How correct Luther was to condemn monasticism where well-meaning Christians sought to divorce themselves from the evil influence of the world. That same kind of self-centered thinking can be found in well-meaning Christians today who believe it is safer and easier to keep their faith to themselves and keep their religion their own business. If we withdraw from the

evil world in the sense of hiding the light of our faith under a cloak of silence and non-involvement, we won't receive the sharp hatred of the world. That's easy! That's safe! But it's not Jesus' wish, and it's not what he prays for as our High Priest.

Jesus prays that God keep the disciples in the world, exposing them to hatred and persecution (cf. the Book of Acts), but he also prays that the Father guard and keep them from $\tau\omicron\upsilon= \rho\omicron\nu\eta\rho\omicron\upsilon=$, "the evil one." This could be translated either as a neuter, "evil," or as a masculine "the evil one" (Satan). Since Jesus has spoken about Satan earlier in his last discourse it would seem likely that Satan is meant here. Jesus asks that the Father protect his disciples from Satan as long as they are in the world exposed to his wiles and temptations. This prayer is a comfort when we are frightened to face the hostility of the world, and it is an incentive to live as one who is not of the world.

$\epsilon\omicron\kappa \tau\omicron\upsilon= \kappa\omicron/\sigma\mu\omicron\upsilon \omicron\upsilon\omicron\kappa \epsilon\iota\omicron\sigma\iota/\nu$, "They are not in the world..." It must have been comforting and assuring for the disciples to hear Jesus describe them as "They are not of the world as I am not of the world." The word which Jesus had brought to them had changed them. They were different from the world. They no longer acted like the world, or plunged into the same flood of dissipation as the world does (1 Pet. 4:4). They were in the world but not of the world.

Here is a worthy truth to apply to your hearers. Christians do not belong to the world and have nothing in common with the world just as Christ was not of the world. The world's interests and objects of worship and pleasure are opposite to those of God. To try to make a compromise with the world is to deny Jesus and the Christian faith. (cf. Heb. 11 :13-16, "strangers and foreigners on earth"; Phil. 3:20 "citizenship is in heaven"; Col. 3:3 "life hidden with Christ in God"; Rom. 12:2 "Do not conform to pattern of the world"; I Jn. 2:15) The disciple of Christ has been set apart from the world to be different, to be holy and to let that difference be known to those of the world. This is sanctification.

Verses 17-19

"Sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world. And on their behalf I consecrate myself in order that they also may continue to be consecrated in truth."

The preceding verses have logically led to this second request of Jesus for his disciples: "Sanctify them." These are familiar words to many but perhaps also misunderstood by many. A comparison of translations on this verse adds to the confusion. The problem is in the verb $\alpha(\gamma\iota\alpha\&zw$. This is an exclusively biblical word which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word $\#\$דק$. It can have either the meaning of "to consecrate - to set apart for a holy use to serve God" or "to sanctify - to make holy." On the one hand the stress is separation from sin and devotion to serve God, and on the other hand it is living a holy life without sin as obedient to God's will.

Jesus uses the word in the sense of "consecrate" in John 10:36 "What about the one [Jesus] whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world." It would make sense to understand the $\alpha(\gamma\iota\alpha\&zw$ in Jn. 17:19 in the same way. Jesus can not make himself holy because He is already without sin and holy. He never ceased to be holy. But Jesus as the Son of God did let himself be set apart to serve the Father. He could also say that he gave himself freely of his own volition to enter into the sacrificial and atoning work that the Father desired him to do. This is in keeping with Jesus being a priest. Old Testament priests were consecrated and anointed to do a mission for God. They were set apart to serve God's will on behalf of his people. I would paraphrase verse 19 as if Jesus were saying, "So that the disciples may be consecrated to you, Father, I am now willingly giving myself completely to do the work of freeing them from sin and separating them from the world as I sacrifice my life and rise to life. In this way, now, may you, Father, set them apart from the world to do the mission of proclaiming your word of truth."

The aorist imperative $\alpha(\gamma\iota/\alpha\sigma\eta\varsigma)$ in verse 17 is usually translated, “Sanctify them...” This cannot mean merely that Jesus prays for their cleansing from sin and being made holy, for this had already been happening as Jesus brought the Word to them. While this is not excluded here in Jesus’ request, the immediate context and the wider context would seem to stress more the meaning of “consecrate.” They too are to be set apart for a mission (“As you sent me into the world, even so I sent them into the world.” vs. 18). They are to be in the world but remain *separate* from the world in order to perform the task God has set for them. For Jesus that task was to reveal God’s name and to sacrifice his life as the perfect atoning payment for sin. For these disciples the task was as Jesus puts it, “You also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn. 15:27). This is also why Jesus, in his last discourse, promised to send the Paraclete to the disciples in a special way to instruct them in the truth and to equip them to do their mission. They were being sent into the world with a message - the same message which changed their life and gave them a new vocation. Through their message (“their words,” vs. 20) others will be brought to faith.

What made this consecration of the disciples possible so that they could do this work of evangelism and find joy in the midst of a hostile stubborn world was Jesus’ own successful completion of his task. The disciples could then know that they were justified and freed from the slavery to Satan and sin. They received strength and the desire to do their task in order to glorify the Father and Christ.

$\alpha(\gamma\iota/\alpha\sigma\eta\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\theta\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \nu\ \epsilon\omicron\nu\ \tau\eta\ \nu\ \alpha)\ \lambda\eta\gamma\epsilon\iota/\alpha\ \nu\ \epsilon\omicron\nu$, “Sanctify them in the truth...” I believe the $\epsilon\omicron\nu$ has a deeper meaning than the sense “by means of...” Jesus had prayed that the disciples be set apart as separate from the world and the evil one. Now he asks for the positive, that they be set apart in the Truth—to be engulfed and permeated with only the truth. This truth was in their hearts. It had made the difference and separated them from the world. They are to continue in the truth as they carry out their mission. The one who would keep them in the truth would be the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15).

Jesus explains how the Holy Spirit will do this in the following phrase, $\omicron(\ \lambda\omicron\&g\omicron\nu\ \omicron(\ \sigma\omicron\ \nu\ \alpha)\ \lambda\eta/\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha\ \&\ \epsilon\omicron\sigma\tau\iota\nu$, “Your word is truth.” The Word communicates to us the truth. This is true whether we speak of the as the person of Christ (who had said, “I am the Truth” (Jn. 14:6) or as the revelation of God in human language—the inspired Scriptures. The Father’s Word is truth. It is composed totally of truth; there is no presence or mixture of error and falsehood.

Verse 17 of Jesus’ prayer has enough in it to preach an entire sermon. There is only one Word which can save, and that word alone is truth. All who look for other sources for truth apart from the Bible, such as new personal revelations, the councils of church leaders, or human reason or human emotions fail to receive the answer of Jesus’ prayer that the Father consecrate his disciples. All who acknowledge that the Word of God is the only means for salvation and is the truth, but then misuse it, mishandle it or ignore it too, will lack the blessings for which Jesus prays. The disciple of Christ is set apart from the perishing world by the Word of God and is made ready for his great mission. There is both law and Gospel, warning and comfort. There is also a call to sanctification for the hearer. As God spoke to Jeremiah, He says to us, his elect, “Before you come forth from the womb I consecrated you: I appointed you a prophet of the nations” (Jer. 1:5) (cf. also Eph. 2:10). Christ made this all possible by his death and resurrection and consecrating himself as our great High Priest.

Verses 20, 21

“Not for these only do I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word. [I pray] that they all be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you. [I pray] that they be in us in order that the world may acknowledge that you sent me.”

Jesus is the High Priest not only for his apostles but also for all true believers. The apostles would be consecrated and they would proclaim the message of salvation to the world. Jesus’ prophetic eye beholds in that

upper room the entire gathering of God's elect, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. He prays for the welfare of all believers everywhere.

peri\ tw~n pisteuontwn, "for those who believe..." I prefer to bring out the present tense of the participle rather than transpose it into the future tense as many translations do (KJV, NIV, "Those who will believe") we should think here of the other disciples of Jesus' day, the 120 who gathered in Jerusalem as well as the 3,000 on Pentecost, the converts of Peter, James, John, Paul and the other disciples, the true believers of the present day and of the entire New Testament Age.

What are these believers like? The same description which Jesus gave for his apostles (vss. 6-8) would apply here. These are the ones who belong to God and were given to Christ, who received his word, believed it, and kept it. They too will be kept in the Father's name, preserved, unified, consecrated and finally glorified. Jesus describes here the true body of believers, the invisible church. This must be stressed to avoid misinterpreting the following verses.

dia_ tou= logou autwn, "through their message..." Here is a significant truth for the church of today. Christ personally brought the apostles to faith by directly giving them God's Word. Now it would be his will that others be brought to faith through the message (logos, singular) of the apostles. Since it is only God's Word that can draw sinners to Christ, the message of the apostles must be identical with Christ's Word. All belief in the church is dependent on the apostles' Word, which now, since their death, must be the written inspired Scriptures (John 20:31; Eph. 2:20). Apart from the Word there is no Church, and to alter or falsify the apostles' Word would endanger the church. This must be kept in mind as the preacher speaks about the unity of the Church.

"I pray that they all be one..." (vs. 21). Jesus now expands on the thought introduced in vs. 11—the unity of his disciples. Here Jesus makes a request for the entire Church. He prays that all believers be united in the same faith as the result of their being kept in God's name. Though they are many, divided by age, race, sex, living in different centuries and belonging to different Christian denominations, Jesus prays that they be one. If they genuinely believe that Jesus is the Christ and their Savior from sin, then they are truly one communion of saints.

The nature of this unity is described in the following clause, "as you, Father, are in me and I in you." John records a number of occasions when Jesus spoke of the unity between himself and the Father (10:30,38; 14:10,11). It was a perfect unity of natures. There was a mutual cooperation and a total agreement between them. One never interfered or hindered the wish of the other. Their every move was in complete harmony. They gave support to each other and interacted with the same wills.

This kind of unity was not to be merely a model for the Church, but Jesus prays that the believer share in this unity. "I pray that they be one in us" (v. 21). Dogmaticians call this the *unio mystica*. Jesus explained this earlier in his last discourse, "The Spirit of Truth...lives with you and will be in you...On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:11,20,23). "I am the vine; you are the branches, if a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5). The Apostles proclaimed Christ's Word so that others could share in the fellowship they had with the Father and Son: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ... we write this to make our joy complete" (1 Jn. 1:3). In order to understand the true unity of the church for which Jesus prays, the hearer must know this comforting truth that as the Father lives in the Son and the Son in the Father, in the same way the Son lives in the believer through the apostle's Word and by living in them, he unites them closely with each other and with His Father.

ina o(kosmov pisteu/h| o#ti su/ me ape/steilav, "in order that the world may acknowledge that you sent me." Jesus is speaking of more than just an inner unity between God and believers and the unity of faith, hope, and love between the true believers of the church, which is visible only to God. This unity for which Jesus prays is to be one that is clearly visible because it is to have an effect on the unbelieving world. There is a divine design and purpose for this unity of the Church to be manifested to the

world. pisteu/h| has the basic meaning “to be convinced of something.” In verse 23 the same thought is expressed, only in place of pisteu/h| , Jesus uses ginw\&skh| . The visible unity of the Church is to bring the world to acknowledge that Jesus came from God. Whether or not many of the world would also be brought to saving faith depends on how the Word which the Church proclaims (Gospel) is received. Some the Holy Spirit will convert, others will resist.

Since it is the Word of Christ which brings people to faith and unites them to Christ and unifies the Church, the unity for which Jesus prays becomes visible as the church proclaims and teaches the *same* truth, the *only* truth which was given them through the Word of the apostles—Holy Scripture. Therefore it follows that the more we have the Word in our lives, the more that Word rules our lives, the more perfect we will be united with God and with each other. The goal of the church is to strive for this unity by proclaiming and teaching the pure Word of God “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

On this point Lenski’s comment is good: “Every deviation in doctrine, life, and practice from the word mars and disrupts our oneness and hinders the fulfillment of Jesus, prayer. Those rend the church who deviate from any part of the Word, also those who demand things other than the Word demands.”^{xiii} On the other hand, where this oneness is manifested outwardly by a fellowship in the same mind and thought (1 Cor. 1:10), the same confession of the truth, and where the church makes evident the power of Christ living in the believer, then Christ’s Word will “break forth more and more and be accepted in the world as God’s Word, in which an almighty, divine, unconquerable power and the treasure of all grace and blessedness reside”(Luther).

This oneness of faith and spiritual unity made the first century Christians a powerful sermon to the world. We know from church history that those early years of the Church were fast growing ones. But since that time, Satan has succeeded in introducing heresies, errors, schisms and divisions so that the lack of unity among churches becomes a roadblock to the world’s acknowledging that Jesus is from God. “The disruption of the Church into parties and factions which are mutually opposed is not acceptable in the sight of God, but is a bitter fruit of sin.”^{xiv} This does not mean that Jesus prayer was not answered. On the Last Day all mankind will acknowledge the power of Christ’s Word, the spiritual unity among the believers and that Jesus came from God and is God (Phil. 2:9-11).

The preacher has a text here that can be used as a timely application. He will want to correct the misuse of this verse by those who find here support for an organic union of religious bodies regardless of differences in confession and doctrines. With the impending union of Lutheran synods, fellowship between Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics, with the popularity of ecumenical services in our communities and with the sometimes confusion of our own members on what religious unity means, the preacher will want to carefully instruct with these clear words of Jesus.

Verses 22, 23

“I myself have given them the glory which you have given to me so that they may be one as we are one: I in you and you in me. [I pray] that they be perfected into one in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you loved them as you loved me.”

$\text{th_n do/can h4n de/dwka\&v moi de/dwka au0toi=v}$, “the glory which you have given me I have given them...” Jesus returns to the subject of glory with which he began his prayer when he asked for his own glorification. Now he announces that he has given to all believers the glory the Father has given him. He is leading up to verse 24 when he prays for the believers’ eternal and final glory.

The hearer will ask, “What is this glory Jesus has given me? I don’t feel glorious.” First of all we note that the glory Jesus has given (pf. tense) is the same glory that his own human nature received at the incarnation and was now about to be fully manifested in his exaltation. It is the sharing of the majesty and splendor of the divine nature. Secondly God has promised that the elect will also receive glory, “Those he predestined, he also

called; those he called he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). Already in this life the believer possesses this glory, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The clearest passage which explains verse 22 is 2 Peter 1:3,4: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

When Christ dwells in the believer who has heard and accepted the Word, and when Jesus and that believer are united (“I in them” vs. 23), then that believer shares in the divine nature. Since Jesus has been glorified and possesses the fullness of the divine nature, his presence in the heart of a believer makes him also a special object of God’s love, a privileged heir of God’s kingdom who will sit with Christ on a glorious throne in heaven (Rev. 3:21). When the believer does not act like the ungodly world but displays instead genuine love, patience, righteousness, forgiveness, etc., he demonstrates that he is under the influence of a superhuman divine power. In addition the more Christlike he becomes through the effect of the Word, the more perfectly he becomes united to God until, when he is in heaven, he is finally glorified and becomes perfectly united with all believers (τeteleiwme/noi). These two points are results of Jesus giving his glory to his disciples.

This is to have an effect on the world, as Jesus mentioned in verse 21. Jesus prays that his church have an impact on the world so that the change seen in believers and evidenced in their lives makes the world realize that Jesus came from God and that the Father loves them with the same love that he loved his own Son. The preacher will want to make his hearer feel special. Though they are sinners and deserve God’s anger, yet because of Christ, they remain important people in God’s eyes, special objects of his love and possessors of divine glory. The hearer will also be admonished and encouraged to let his glory show to the world, “That they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16).

Verse 24

“Father, I will that where I am, those you have given me may be with me in order that they may behold my glory which you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

No longer does Jesus use ε0rwtα&w, now he expressed his desire (qe/lw) as a son who can expect his father to answer because he acts according to his Father’s will and because the Father loved him before the foundation of the world. (I take the ο#τι clause to govern the entire verse, particularly the main verb qe/lw, and not just the relative clause preceding it, “which (glory) you gave me.”)

As the High Priest praying for God’s people, Jesus reaches the climax of his prayer for the church. It is the final goal to which all of Jesus’ work had pointed. It presents God’s will for the final end of the church - to be in his very presence and behold (qewrw~sin, “gaze as a spectator”) the radiance of his glory and joyfully give adoration. This is the essence of heaven—to share the glory of Christ in his presence. Jesus thus prays for the invisible church to be transformed into the Church Triumphant. This would be accomplished as the Father preserves the elect from the world (vss. 11-16), and as he consecrates those elect already brought to faith to bring the Word to the rest of the elect who have not yet believed. Finally all (neuter ο#) which God has given to Christ, will be perfectly united and share in the glory of heaven.

How can anyone use this section (vss. 20-24) to refer to the visible church where hypocrites are present and use it to defend unionism? Let us as preachers rather use these precious words to bring personal comfort to every sin-struck soul under our care who needs the assurance of Jesus’ promise: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36). With Martin Luther we confess that the purpose of Christ’s whole redemptive activity was “that I might be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”

Verses 25, 26

“Father, on the one hand the world did not know you, (of course I knew you) and on the other hand these knew that you sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will go on making it known in order that the love with which you loved me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Jesus puts on the closing remarks of his prayer—sort of a summation and epilogue. He once more addresses the Father and adds the modifier, “Righteous Father.” “He who fulfilled all righteousness may well expect from him the hearing of a prayer based upon the complete redemption of the world.” It is Jesus’ way of saying “Amen—yes, so shall it be—this is most certainly true.”

Jesus states two truths which describe the only two reactions to his work in the world. “The world did not know you”—these will never enjoy the object of God’s love nor enjoy the glory of Christ. “These did know that you sent me”—these will be the objects of the Father’s love. Jesus had his 11 disciples in mind as he speaks these words in their hearing. In his ministry Jesus had revealed the first class of people as he addressed the Pharisees, “You do not know me or my Father... .. You are from below; I am from above. You are of the world; I am not of the world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be you will indeed die in your sin ... My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him” (John 8:19,23,24,54,55).

Let the preacher warn his hearers that they not become like the Pharisees who heard Jesus’ word yet remained a part of the unbelieving world and never knew the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. On the other hand may we be like the disciples who believed Jesus was the Savior. And why did they believe while the world did not? Because Jesus made known the Father’s name to them.

ἐὼς ἔγνωσαν αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομα σου καὶ ἔγωγε ἔγραψα, “I made known to them your name and I will go on making it known.” Jesus brought to the disciples the Father’s Word so that they could have eternal life. This passage becomes personal to us when Jesus promises that he will continue to make the Father known. We who know God and eternal life are proof that Jesus still is making believers through the Word, the Gospel, so that the love of God may dwell in their hearts as he himself does.

I would like to close this exegetical commentary by citing the concluding verses of Psalm 22 where the Messiah, having described his obedience to be humbled to death on a cross, declares what he will do with the Father’s name, that is, his revelation to man of his gracious act of salvation. Note how the themes of Jesus’ high priestly prayer can be seen in the words. (“I have manifested your name,” “I have brought you glory”) “Glorify your Son,” “I have sent them into the world,” “Father, guard them in your name.”

“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. From you comes my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it” (Psalm 22:22-31).

Homiletical Suggestions

I personally am looking forward to preaching on John, chapter 17. It is filled with an inspiring Gospel content. It is a very applicable text both to the individual believer and to the congregation as a unit. But the chapter is not without its problems. The chief problem, I believe, is to capture Jesus' thoughts in human words with a logical development. Jesus' words here are so lofty and so full of feeling and knowledge about spiritual truths that they surpass human wisdom.

It is difficult to treat the text analytically because there are no definite boundaries. There are three general sections in the chapter:

- Verses 1-5: Jesus prays for his glorification
- Verses 6-19: Jesus prays for his disciples
- Verses 20-26: Jesus prays for all his believers (the Church)

However, each section is dependent on the others. For example, in the last section Jesus prays for the glorification of the church, but the glorification of the church is also a part of his own glorification. In the first section Jesus prays for his glory but that involves giving eternal life to his Church. One could try preaching on the entire chapter as a single text, but he might make the Guinness World Book of Records for a marathon sermon. (Only after 30 minutes he may have an audience of one, his wife.) Dividing the chapter into sections is not easy either. A look at the manner in which the different pericope series treat the chapter will reveal a wide difference of opinion on where to divide the texts.

A second problem (if we can call it a "problem") is that the content of the prayer is primarily all Gospel. There are no direct Law passages. They are all either objective statements of what Jesus has done for our salvation, or they are promises of blessings for us, or they are requests for our eternal good. The preacher should keep in mind that the great comfort of this chapter will be real and welcome only by those who are hungering for it, and only the Law can work that hunger. The Law certainly is implied in certain passages, and I tried to point these out in the commentary.

The danger I see in preaching on this text is to become too dogmatic so that the finished sermon would sound like my commentary. (I would be the first to admit that the past 21 pages did not grab you and keep you on the edge of your seats attentively listening.) While such a sermon would be correct and God's truth would be proclaimed, would not such a dry dissertation hinder the working of God's Word in your hearers? Another danger will be to present the truths in a way that the hearer can not easily follow you. When I first read this chapter, I had great difficulty following its line of thought. Now, having spent many hours exegizing it, I have no trouble; but what I think is a neat organized, logical outline may leave the hearer wondering what I was trying to say between the "Dear Christian Friends ..." and the "Amen."

Prof. E.H. Wendland makes an appropriate comment about treating John chapter 17 in a homiletical manner: "The preacher must stand in awe before the beauty of Christ's prayer with a prayer in his own heart that by God's grace he might be able to convey its meaning to his hearers. One surely would not want to detract in any way from its grandeur. A way to avoid doing this would be to preach the truth of the text with as little embellishment as possible."^{xv}

I have listed for myself a set of goals I would like to aim for as I preach on John, chapter 17:

1. Make Jesus more personal to the hearer.
2. Help the hearer to avoid misunderstanding the mystery of the two natures of Christ and his states of humiliation and exaltation, so that he can ever stand in awe at the person of Christ.
3. Strengthen the hearer's assurance of eternal life based on the certainty of Jesus' successfully completed redemptive work.
4. Emphasize the importance of the pure Word of God (Holy Scripture) for the health and good of the church: preservation, consecration, unification and glorification.

5. Sharpen the clear distinction for the hearer between him and the world. Make him more sensitive to the truth that he is in the world but not of the world.
6. Encourage the hearer to be a consecrated disciple of Christ on a daily mission for the Lord to tell the Good News.
7. Make the hearer not only to appreciate the unity of the church) but also to actively strive for it to continue and increase.

The briefest way to treat John, chapter 17, would be a *3 sermon series* with each sermon covering each of the general sections. This is the approach taken by the ILCW pericope series. Each year of the series on the Seventh Sunday of Easter, treats one section of John, chapter 11. The following theme and parts are suggested from the Homiletical Helps of *The Concordia Journal*.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| John 17:1-11 | The Glory of the Cross: Our Savior's Finest Hour <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. God's glory is the cross. II. Our glory is the cross.^{xvi} |
| John 17:11b-19 | Be Consecrated in the Truth <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Be consecrated. II. Be consecrated in the truth.^{xvii} |
| John 17:20-26 | Christ's Prayer for His Church <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Christ prayed for the unity of His Church. II. Christ prayed for the glorification of the Church.^{xviii} |

My preference is to treat the chapter with a 5 or 6 sermon series. Because of the smaller more workable sections, the preacher can make a more thorough exposition and application. This series would do well for the Sundays after Easter. The content of the prayer follows nicely the post-Easter themes: the exaltation of Jesus, the successful completion of his redemptive work, Jesus' concern for his ministry to continue in his disciples so that the Gospel reaches out to the world, the consecration and preservation of the church (work of the Holy Spirit), and the final goal for the church, glorification in heaven with the resurrected and living Christ.

Sermon 1: The Second Sunday of Easter, Hebrews 7:21-28; John 17:1

This would be the introductory sermon of the series. I wanted to give a solid background to the chapter and felt that a sermon on the High Priestly office of Christ was in order. Therefore the opening text is taken from a different section of Scripture. The seventh chapter of Hebrews brings out the supremacy of Jesus' priesthood and stresses its permanency (Jesus is alive forever). It also brings out the two chief functions of the High Priest: to mediate by intercession and to reconcile by offering a sacrifice.

The Priest for All People

- I. We need a priest.
 - A. to speak to God for us (intercession).
 - B. To make us certain of forgiveness and eternal life
 - C. The Old Testament priest / modern substitutes
- II. Jesus is the best priest.
 - A. deficiencies of the OT priest and modern substitutes.
 - B. Jesus was installed as a priest with an oath.

- C. Jesus is a permanent priest.
- D. Jesus is human but holy.
- E. Jesus a once-for-all-sacrifice for sins.
- F. Jesus is interceding for us even now.

Application: It is reassuring to know that someone really cares about what happens to us in this life and in the afterlife. It is reassuring that every time we sin, Jesus is already asking God to put away our sin for his sake.

Sermon 2: The Second Sunday of Easter, John 17:1-5

“Glorify Me, Father”

- I. Jesus deserves it.
 - A. He has always been God and worthy of glory (but he became a man and humbled himself)
 - B. He completed the Work he was sent to do.
 - C. The world is to know He is God and its Savior
- II. We benefit by it.
 - A. We have despised God’s glory.
 - B. The elect are entrusted to Jesus.
 - C. From Jesus they receive eternal life which consists in knowing God and Jesus.
- III. The Father approves it.
 - A. He is well-pleased in His Son.
 - B. It is his will to glorify him.
 - C. His grace and glory are thus revealed to us that we might worship him.

Sermon 3: The Fourth Sunday of Easter, John 17:6-12

“Preserve My Disciples, Father”

- I. They are ours
 - A. We have to wonder why; they don’t deserve it.
 - B. By grace God chose the elect to belong to him and his Son.
 - C. So Jesus is our dear friend who always has us foremost on his mind.
- II. I gave them your Word.
 - A. Jesus revealed God’s name to them
 - B. They are affected by the Word (believed it, kept it, confessed it, glorified Christ)
- III. They can’t be left alone in the world.
 - A. Jesus guarded their faith from the world while he was with them.
 - B. The world seeks to snatch them away (cf. Judas)
 - C. Though he is about to leave them, Jesus trusts the power of the Word.

Sermon 4: The Fifth Sunday of Easter, John 17:13-19

“Consecrate My Disciples, Holy Father”

- I. By your Word set them apart from the world.
 - it’s safer and more pleasant to “blend in” with the world./ But the world knows only the lies of Satan and follows them./ We know the truth because we have received God’s Word./ Christ’s Word has made us different from the world.

- II. By your Word set them apart for the world.
 - we are tempted to withdraw from the world and be silent because the world hates Christians./ But Jesus consecrated himself for us and the world and wants us to be consecrated for the world's sake- to be sent out into the world as witnesses, evangelists./ Word of truth is our reason, our power) our assurance./ Jesus' prayer takes away our fears.

Sermon 5: The Sixth Sunday of Easter, John 17:20-23

“Unify My Church, Righteous Father”

May the elect be:

- I. United through the apostles' word.
- II. One as we are one
- III. A single voice to the world.

Sermon 6: The Seventh Sunday of Easter, John 17:24-26

Sermon 5 could have included all the verses of 17:20-26 to make this only a five sermon series. However, since confirmation Sunday falls around this time in some churches, I saw possibilities in the last verses for an appropriate message to new and old confirmands.

Jesus' Confirmation Prayer

- I. “They shall know God.”
- II. “My love shall be in them.”
- III. “May they see my glory.”

Appendix: The Use of John 17 in Pericope Series

[Source: *Biblical Texts*. Paul W. Nesper. Augsburg Publishing House, 1961]

<u>Verses</u>	<u>Sunday</u>	<u>Pericope Series</u>
1-8	Easter 3	Saxon; Ranke
1-10	Easter 4	Nitsch
1-11	Easter 4 Easter 5	Fendt-Liefeld-Owens Hannover
1-16	Lent 4	Synodical Conference
3	Advent 1	Saxon
6-10	Reformation	Saxon
9-17	Easter 4	Swedish
9-19	Easter 4	Ranke
11-13	Ascension	Saxon
11-26	Ascension	Nitsch; Eisenach
12-18	Easter 3	Fendt-Liefeld-Owens
12-26	Ascension	Hannover
17-24	Easter 4	Lenski
17-26	Ascension	Synodical Conference
18-23	Easter 5	Swedish
20-26	Easter 5	Ranke; Fendt-Liefeld-Owens
24	All Saints Day	Saxon
24-26	Ascension	Swedish
1-11	Easter 7	InterLutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) Series A
11b-19	Easter 7	ILCW Series B
20-26	Easter 7	ILCW Series C

Endnotes

- ⁱ Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Augsburg, 1943) p. 1114.
- ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 76.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hendriksen, William, *Exposition of the Gospel According to St. John* (Baker Book House, 1953) p. 85.
- ^{iv} August Pieper, "The Glory of the Lord" (essay translated by John Schaadt and Carl Lawrenz) (Seminary Mimeo Co., Mequon, WI). p. 7.
- ^v *The Formula of Concord (Epitome), Triglote Concordia* (Concordia, St. Louis, 1921) p. 821, par. 16.
- ^{vi} David P. Kuske, *An Exposition of Luther's Small Catechism*, (Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1982) p. 59.
- ^{vii} Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, Vol. I (New Testament)* (Concordia) p. 504.
- ^{viii} *Ibid*.
- ^{ix} Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. VIII (Eerdmans, 1972). p. 358.
- ^x Lenski, op. cit. p. 1140.
- ^{xi} Kretzmann, op. cit. p. 505
- ^{xii} Kretzmann, op. cit. p. 505 (quotation of Luther)
- ^{xiii} Lenski, op. cit. p. 1157.
- ^{xiv} Joh. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels* (Augsburg, 1932) p. 690.
- ^{xv} E.H. Wendland (ed.), *Sermon Studies on the Gospels (ILCW Series C)* (Northwestern Publishing House, 1982) p. 207.
- ^{xvi} Bartelt, Andrew H. *The Concordia Journal* (March, 1981) p. 79.
- ^{xvii} Knippel, Charles T. *The Concordia Journal* (March, 1982) p. 68.
- ^{xviii} Johnson, John F. *The Concordia Journal* (March, 1980) p. 77.

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