

**John 17.1-11**  
**May 17, 2026, Easter 7A**

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**Acts 1:6-14**

<sup>6</sup>When [the apostles] had come together, they asked [Jesus], "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying:

Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas,  
 Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus,  
 and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

<sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

**John 17:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples,] he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup>"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

<sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

For three weeks,

the scene hasn't changed;

Jesus and his disciples are *still*

gathered at the table of the last supper.

I see the bowls and the towels

set just to the side from where

he washed their feet.  
 I hear his words still ringing in the air,  
 from when he told them  
     the *one non-negotiable thing*  
         that's required of them —  
 that they love each other  
         in that same way he loves them.

His arrest is imminent,  
     and he closes his last supper  
         with a prayer.  
 There's a lot to this prayer,  
     but one curious part  
         stands out to me this time around.  
 He prays, "I glorified you on earth  
     by finishing the work  
         that you gave me to do."

He's finished his work?  
     What about the dying and being raised part?  
         Isn't *that* the work  
             he was sent to do?  
             To die for our sins?

Maybe not.  
     Maybe crucifixion is just  
         the inevitable conclusion.  
             It's what you get when you  
                 challenge  
                     age-old systems of power  
                         based on exploitation and fear.

Jesus came teaching  
     a system of power  
         based on service and love —  
             a system that's dangerous  
                 to wielders of exploitation and fear.

His work is finished.  
     It's time for him to go back  
         to the place he's held  
             since before the creation.  
 And it's time for his students  
     to lead the mission now.  
         Remember, he told them,  
             "*You'll do greater things than I've done.*"

His whole movement  
 is a model of community  
 that's built on (and empowered by)  
 mutual service and love.

This is his work.

He has done it.  
 He has birthed a community  
 of service and love  
 in a world that  
 is driven by the power of  
 exploitation and fear.

He prays for his infant community.  
 He prays for God to protect  
 their ability to hold on to  
 their communal oneness  
 and not be pulled apart  
 by the fears and powers  
 of this world.

Yet they remain in this world;  
 the community's whole existence,  
 everything he's taught them,  
 is for the sake of the world.

Now he prays specifically  
 for those he's taught  
 and for the ones  
 who will come after them —  
 a tender prayer,  
 a loving prayer.

He knows what they're facing.

He knows the inevitable conclusion  
 to the lives of a community  
 empowered by service and love  
 in a world that runs on  
 the power of dominance and fear.

The gospel scene is the last supper.

The scene in our Acts reading  
 is post-resurrection —  
 the moment when Jesus  
 makes his ascension back  
 to the place he's held  
 since before the creation.

Just before the disciples watch him

ascend out of their sight,  
 they ask him a question  
 that shows they're still stuck in a  
*"this-world-power"* paradigm.  
 They still don't understand  
 the work he's done.  
 He basically tells them  
*"Don't worry about  
 kingdoms and times.  
 God has all that covered."*  
 He promises them the Holy Spirit  
 and the power that comes with the Spirit.  
 Power that will help them continue  
 the work he initiated in them.

Then he's gone, and they stand there  
 with their mouths hanging open  
 staring into the empty space  
 where they last saw him.

Left in a world  
 where a tyrant-oppressor's  
 every whim  
 has devastating effects  
 on those who are  
 the most vulnerable  
 and have the least voice,  
 I imagine the disciples  
 feeling quite powerless.

And that makes me feel a bit better!  
 As our list of countries  
 in conflict and war grows,  
 and people's lives  
 are being shattered,  
 and human rights  
 are being trampled,  
 I feel powerless.

I sometimes, even,  
 feel the church is powerless  
 in the face of forces  
 that are hell-bent on  
 self-serving manipulations  
 and schemes —  
 tyrant-oppressors

who care nothing  
for the people who pay the costs  
of their ego.

It's a powerless feeling.

And then a couple of what, angels(?)  
shake the disciples out of their paralysis:

*"what are you staring at?  
In the same way you saw him go,  
you'll see him come."*

And with that,  
the disciples are gathered  
back to community,  
all of them together  
in constant devotion  
to how they saw him go —  
with prayer.

Maybe the angel's words:

*"the way you saw him go  
is the way you'll see him come"*  
is not that he'll come  
descending from the clouds,  
but it's about prayer.

What's the last thing he does  
before he goes to be  
handed over to death?

He prays.

All four gospels report the same.

Jesus prays right before  
he's betrayed and arrested.

And what is it the disciples do  
when they're shaken out of their stupor?  
They pray — constantly.

I'll admit,

sometimes I don't know how to pray.  
Sometimes I don't know what prayer does,  
or what it's intended to do,  
or even why we do it.

But I know it's important.

We do worry about kingdoms and times,  
and we hope,

with our feeble hope,  
 that God has all that covered.

And we pray.

We pray together as one  
 and as individuals.

We pray for countries and crises  
 over which we have little or no influence.

We pray about illnesses and griefs  
 which seem to have *no* prayer.

Maybe our prayers shape *our* hearts.

And maybe your prayer shapes *my* heart,  
 or the prayer of the person  
 across the aisle from you  
 shapes *your* heart.

Or maybe,

as we all pray our corporate prayers together,  
 we are *all* transformed  
 into a loving, serving body  
 (and bodies)  
 of Christ  
 equipped by the Spirit  
 to help reshape the world —  
 at least our small  
 window of it.

Jesus prays for his 1st century disciples  
 in a world of oppressive exploitation and fear,  
 and he prays for us 21st century disciples  
 in the same way —

that we may never lose our devotion  
 to our communal oneness,  
 that we'll never lose our devotion  
 to service and love.

And it seems to me,

*praying together*  
 is the way we see *him* —  
 in the prayers,  
 in the service,  
 in the love  
 of each other.

For the sake of the world.  
 For the sake of

all the things for which  
we think there is no prayer.