

05.26.24 ~ Pentecost 2 & Memorial Sunday

“Gone But Not Forgotten”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

John 17:1-18, 20-22 (NIV)

Jesus Prays to Be Glorified

¹ After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

⁶ “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Jesus Prays for All Believers

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—

Leader: These Are Christ’s Words of Remembrance.

All: Thanks be to God!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV)

Believers Who Have Died

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Leader: These Are God's Words of Comfort!

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Lord, our Comforter, we thank you for those who have gone on before us; we love them and have heard how much you love them too. We seek peace around our loss and praise you that we are not alone. Your community of believers also comforts us and helps us remember with no regrets. As Christ prayed for his disciples, let us pray for those who are gone but not forgotten. Help us Lord to open our hearts and minds to the mysterious power that you promised in Christ and his Advocate. May the Holy Spirit fall on us again today and always as we strive to do your will. We still rejoice at the resurrection and your shared spirit through these scriptures; may your comforting voice be heard today through this messenger. Amen.

I'm baaack! And happy to be back with my church family.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day, a federal holiday, and as many are already on the road travelling to vacations, weddings, or graduations, we choose this Sunday to remember our loved ones. Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day in 1869 to honor those who died during the Civil War by placing flowers on their graves. As of 1971, the last Monday of May became the official annual Federal holiday where we remember the fallen from war and those dead who served in military service to our country. They are gone, but not forgotten. A time of prayer and reflection begins at 11:00 am tomorrow with Flags flown at half-staff, and the

nation will pause for a moment of reflection at 3:00 pm. Many will mark the day with parades and music celebrating those dedicated lives.

For our church, over the years, it has become the tradition you saw today, sometimes with flowers, crosses, stones, and today with commemorative shells. I chose shells this year because of our theme, Finding Beauty. How many of us have gathered shells washed up on the beach and marveled at the natural beauty of their patterns, shape, and purpose? The conk and lobster shell on the table represent shelter for two types of God's creatures. Their beauty reminds us of God's divine creativity and clever design for the natural world in which we live. May the beauty of the shells you received give you comfort and assurance that his beauty lives on in your memories and experiences.

Let's look at our Scriptures for today. Just before the first passage, Jesus tells his disciples they will no longer see him; and although they will scatter, his Father God will stay with him in the coming ordeal of the cross. He warns: In the world you face persecution but take courage. You will find peace because I have overcome the world. Those are relevant words for today; we do face persecution in the world's culture and violence. But as believers, we must not surrender to the evil around us, but rather, we must pray for the peace that only Christ brings to our hearts and minds. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has overcome Satan, and because we are saved and sanctified, we have nothing to fear. He has overcome the world! His glory prevails now and forever.

The context of our passage is prayer, and although we feel helpless when we read or hear the headlines of violence in war torn areas or in our major cities, we **can** pray. In today's verses, Jesus is praying to God for

his disciples who he taught, loved, nurtured, healed, fed, and comforted. When we recall our loved ones who've passed on, the veterans who have died, and the lost missionaries that we honor today, we don't often think of them in the way that John recounts how Jesus describes his friends who've become his family. He says: “¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.” Jesus is remembering the apostles who have become friends he will leave behind, and although he too is grieving in his intercessory prayer, Jesus reminds himself and his followers that he and the Father are one:

¹¹ Holy Father, I am no longer in the world. I am coming to you, but my followers are still in the world. So, keep them safe by the power of the name you have given me. Then they will be one with each other, just as you and I are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost, except the one who had to be lost. This happened so that what the Scriptures say would come true. ¹³ I am on my way to you. But I say these things while I am still in the world, so my followers will have the same complete joy that I do (John 17:12-13 ^{CEV}).

I propose that in this year of remembrance, since we know they were faithful, let us recall those we celebrate today as Jesus describes his disciples: glorified, joyful, and one with him as he is with God the Father. Let us remember how much **they shared Jesus with others**—family, friends, co-workers, and even strangers. The ones we celebrate today were obedient to God's Word. Although Christ's prayer was specific for the eleven, it applies to all believers for protection, unity, and intimacy with the Father. Jesus asks God's care not only on behalf of his disciples, but also on behalf of the ones who came to believe in him because of their faith. We may never know how many were converted, but we do know the abundant seeds sown, fed, and watered by these we celebrate today.

Our loved ones and those who served God and country were set apart for God's use here on earth and they lived according to his will.

Days like tomorrow do bring people together in unity; the unity Christ wants for his church and his people is like that unity the Son has with his Father, and true, we may not see that true unified spirit until Christ comes again. But it is my hope that until that day, we live as Christ's community of disciples, supporting one another, encouraging each other, and providing for those who have no community or no belief. May we remember Paul's writing to the Thessalonians: those who have "fallen asleep" are Christians who die and will be resurrected with Christ when he comes again. The ceremonies we observe are symbolic and instructive, not just sad. We need a safe and visible place to share experiences of God, of people who lived and are living out their faith, a place of comfort, and a reminder of the unity that comes through intercessory prayer in a trusted community. We need other people to share our pain and rebuild our hope, knowing that we are not alone.

We must take hope in Paul's words from our second passage, even if we do not understand them. Although we do grieve, we also look forward to being reunited when Jesus returns. That is our hope in Christ, not just for ourselves but for those we have loved and who have loved and served us. Salvation and resurrection are also our hope as we share the Gospel story with others who may come to believe. As Jesus prayed, let us pray for those we have loved and those we love now, so that we too may be blessed. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for the chance to remember in spirit and symbol those we miss and those who served you and our

country. We thank you for your son, Jesus, his sacrifice and for the mystery of your Comforter, the Holy Spirit. We ask you to bless all who mourn and pour joy into their lives remembering the giftedness of those we celebrate today. Even in our pain, let us share our faith in you with others. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**