

## “Let It Be”

*Dr. Robert Miller*

There was a tavern near a college campus, and it was a favorite hangout for many of the students.

As Parent’s Weekend approached, they posted a sign that said, “Bring your parents to lunch. We’ll pretend we *don’t* know you.”

One of the nearby local churches countered with a signboard that read, “Bring your parents to church. We’ll pretend we *do* know you.”

Today’s scripture lesson on this Ascension Sunday leaves no doubt that God knows Jesus and Jesus knows God and as witnesses to this we too, are included and known.

As I was beginning to prepare for writing this sermon, I had a phone conversation with Pastor Amy. (I paraphrase here but our conversation was most helpful.) I said “Pastor Amy, I need a bit of help here. John has always seemed a bit like the “Magical Mystery Tour” of the gospels.” Now folks, please don’t take offense here.

How many of you remember the Beatles? I do. I can remember at 7 years old hearing them for the first time. Yep, every Sunday evening our family would watch “The Wonderful World of Disney” and then “The Ed Sullivan Show”. And I remember seeing the Beatles! Remember those songs? “She Loves You”; “I Want To Hold Your Hand”. They had hit after hit with a three-chord pop song formula for several years. And then... “Magical Mystery Tour”. So different, broke the formula that had given them hit after hit. “Can’t Buy Me Love”; “Ticket To Ride”; “We Can Work It Out. And then... a major transition if both musicology and complexity.

The album “Magical Mystery Tour”. And what a hit, song after song on the album.

And Pastor Amy got it. She knew what I meant. The Gospel of John is quite different in complexity and perhaps even more important in its goals than the first three gospels. And with a simple statement, Pastor Amy assisted me. Referring to the Gospel of John, she said “I always try to focus on a couple of the goals. Ahhhh!

Let’s take a quick look at the goals of the writer of the gospel lesson this morning.

*(Brief Introduction to the zeitgeist of the Gospel of John here)*

Our scripture lesson this morning leaves no doubt that Jesus is no longer speaking to his disciples, he is praying to God. Unlike so many parables in the synoptic gospels, i.e. Matthew, Mark and Luke, this is not a lesson or a miracle. **It is a prayer.** This is a radical shift from the rest of the other gospels account of the farewell meal.

Here, Jesus speaks exclusively to God; the community is spoken of only in the third person. Jesus never turns from God to address his disciples directly. And one of our gifts in this passage is the same as the gift given here to his disciples. We have the privilege of hearing Jesus’s prayer to his Father. To ignore this difference, we risk losing the meaning of what the Fourth Evangelist has created. This is an intimate moment between Jesus and God, and we standby on the outside, overhearing. This text is referred to as the “Farewell Discourse” and it is a prayer.

And what we hear is faith provoking, filled with Jesus’ love for us.

First, Jesus speaks to God in prayer *on behalf of us*. Jesus entrusts the hope for the future of his followers to God. Remember Jesus has made promises to his disciples and the reader about the future and in this prayer, Jesus now entrusts these to God. It is a striking theological move. Rather than giving last minute instructions about what the disciples should do in his absence; instead, his words turn the future of the community over to God.

And in doing so, Jesus models how we are to understand and receive our identity in the world. No pragmatic directive on church unity. Rather, he asks that we be placed in the hands of God. As contemporary readers of this prayer, we come face to face with Jesus's request for God's grace for each of us. And that grace calls us to action. (And just a sidebar here, this is so consistent with the theology of John Wesley and the tenants of our United Methodist Church.)

We are the recipients of Jesus' prayer to his Father, recipients of grace.

Second, in this prayer, we overhear *the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with God*. God's presence is actively invoked and drawn upon by Jesus. And he addresses God as "Father". Jesus is close enough to God that he can lay his petitions and intercessions before the Father in the confidence *that he will be heard!* He turns to the One who sent him and loves him. It is in our overhearing that gives this passage it's theological power.

Jesus's prayer, offered in confidence that God is *present and hears*, is an amazing scripture to bring to conclusion the interaction of Father and Son that has so dominated the Fourth Gospel. Jesus has insisted that he and God have been engaged in ongoing conversation throughout this gospel and this prayer embodies this truth.

And in the content of this prayer, *Jesus is bold enough to hold God to His promises.* You have sent, you have loved; now keep, sanctify, let them be one. Jesus shares in God's glory, even in his last hours. The relationship between the Father and Son is revealed. It enables us to hear that each of us who He loves, are at one with God's desires. And that love between Father and Son connects us to both; to work together for the future of the world.

Finally, when contemporary readers overhear this prayer, we are given a glimpse of life with God that transcends conventional limits of time and expectations. This prayer invites the reader to contemplate a life with God! *It points us to a future in which God's care is complete and His love is fully realized for all of us.* It is this realization that makes daily life possible ***through it all.*** As Jesus prays at his hour, that "the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them".

I personally am reminded of a quote from the theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, "And now with God's help, I shall become myself".

Today and every day, may the love between God and Jesus remind us that in this loving relationship, we too are known and each and every one of us...are loved.

May Jesus' prayer speak to each of us today. As the Beatles sang in one of their last songs, "Speaking words of wisdom, let it be, let it be".

References:

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