



**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday  
The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson Sermon Transcript**

**“One Foot In Eternity”**

Being with someone who is dying and witnessing them being here and yet already there” is how the Rev. Phillip Jackson describes our encounter with Jesus in today’s Gospel reading. When Jesus prays aloud for his disciples he seems to be speaking from across time, because “time has no meaning in eternity” and therefore this final prayer, a prayer for all of us, has already been answered. Watch his sermon from Sunday, May 16. The scriptures are Acts 1:15–17, 21–26; 1 John 5:9–13; Psalm 1; and John 17:6–19.

**Sermon Transcript:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated, everyone.

Good morning. Good morning to all those who are watching our webcast. It's good to have you with us and good to be with you as well. I want to say something about the gospel that we just heard from John 17. My thoughts are a little scattered and encoded I'm afraid, because this week I was reading the great commentary on John's gospel by Raymond Brown probably my favorite New Testament scholar. In his commentary on John 17, he writes this, "We now come to one of the most majestic moments in the fourth gospel. The climax of the last discourse, where Jesus turns to His Father in prayer." In the prayer of John 17, Jesus still speaks in the context of The Last Supper. But from the tone of what He says and from the tenses of the verbs; and this is the part of the garden, one feels that Jesus has crossed the threshold from time to eternity and is already on the way to the Father, or at least halfway between this world and the Father's presence." Jesus is halfway now. Let's see how John's gospel gets us to this prayer in John 17.

Recall that in Chapter 13, Jesus and the disciples are in Jerusalem for the final time. They eat the last supper together, it is night. Jesus washes the disciples' feet, thereby giving them an example of how they are to treat one another. He then says that, "One of you will betray me," a discordant note. At that, Judas leaves. He then gives them a mandatum novum; a new commandment. That new commandment is to love one another as He has loved them, they are now to love one another. Another discordant note. That interchange with Peter happens next, where he predicts that before the night is over, before dawn breaks, Peter will deny him three times. A jarring painful note, which sorrows Peter and breaks his heart. This we know comes true. In Chapter 14, Jesus begins what is called the farewell discourse. It is His last body of teaching to the disciples.

He starts in Chapter 14 and goes all the way to Chapter 17. Then in Chapter 17, He says, our lesson for today, part of it, is a final prayer. Jesus' praise for His disciples. We'll come back to that. Then at the conclusion of the prayer, Chapter 18, the passion begins immediately following. Why are we reading this text again? Why are we reading this text now? Why are we reading this text which just happened before the Passion begins? Why are we reading it in Easter season and after Ascension Day? Why are we reading it now? I have a suggestion about that, which I'll come to in a minute. But I think it is

appropriate to hear it now because time and eternity in this prayer have molded into one. What will happen has happened and what is happening both has happened and will happen, and time itself is compressed into the eternal moment. It is appropriate that we read this after the resurrection because in some sense, Jesus is telling us today that the resurrection has already happened and He has already ascended to His Father. Let's look at what we have today. John 17:6-19. Remember, we are like the disciples. Jesus is praying. He has been teaching them outright. Then in chapter 17, He prays. Notice, He's praying aloud. They can hear him, more appropriately. We might say they can overhear him because the dialogue is between who? Jesus and His Father. They are overhearing it.

The sense of intimacy between the two of them, between God the Father and Jesus is so clearly manifest in the way He speaks to God. That it's as if here again, time both expands and compresses. It is as if when He prays for something, it has already happened. The only section we have today is His prayer for the disciples whom the Father has given Him. This prayer actually is longer and includes three things that Jesus prays for. First, He prays for his own glorification. His glorification is what takes place on the cross. Seems strange and discordant again, but in John's gospel, the glorification of Jesus is synonymous with the passion of Jesus and the cross of Jesus. It turns the world upside down, so that an act of violence like that can become the means of glory. We say that all the time, don't we? That this thing of shame would become a thing of glory. That's what he prays for first, his own glorification. He then prays second for this thing, this is what we have today. He prays for his disciples. His disciples, whom the Father has given him. Now, tenderly, beautifully, Jesus gives them back to his father because he knows his going, He gives them beautifully, softly, back to his father, that his father might care for them and look after them. That's the prayer today.

The third prayer that we don't have today is for those who will believe through the preaching of the disciples. He prays for us, he's praying for us. He prays for the church. Again, time is both shortened, compressed, and lengthened, and inclusive of us, and them, at the same time. When he's praying for those who will hear the gospel, make no mistake. He's praying for you and for me. The prayer has already been answered. What's strange also in this text is as I mentioned that Raymond Brown points out, is that the verb tenses are a challenge. Where and when exactly is Jesus speaking from? Listen to what he says. He says, at one point, "I am asking" present tense, "I am asking on their behalf." But then he says, "and now I am no longer in the world." It's as if he's already ascended to the right hand of his father. He says, "I am no longer in the world." but they are in the world, and then he says to his father, "and I am coming to you." He says, while I was with them in the past, I protected them, I guarded them, so that the scripture, not one of them was lost, except the one destined, Judas, to be lost. He says, "but now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world." Is he in the world or is he no longer in the world? He says both.

He's both there already and here still, and yet he speaks of, "I'm coming to you." In the Greek. it's very jumbled, like that. It's very jumbled. But if we go back to what I was saying at the beginning, it is as if Jesus, at this moment, in this prayer, before the passion begins, has both simultaneously, one foot here in time and one foot here in eternity. He has both feet planted, one here and one there. Philosopher Roger Scruton writes about this and talks about this concept of being at the far horizon of the world. When you're at the far horizon of the world, you both simultaneously look out to God and can look back to time. I have witnessed something similar to this several times in my ministry. Perhaps, you have too. Have you ever been with someone who's dying and witnessed them be simultaneously here and already there? I've seen this several times in my time as a priest, several times, where I've been witness to people who are here, and yet they're already there. The way I sometimes describe it, to the families, the

friends and people. I say, it's like they're there but haven't left yet. They know they're going to a place where concepts like love and justice and truth will no longer be concepts. They'll be shown to be the things that are really concrete.

In that world, those won't be ideas, they are things. Love is a thing. Justice as a thing. Truth, beauty, thing. They're things such as we can describe them. My even trying to describe them doesn't even come close, doesn't even at all reached the level of what I'm crazily trying to say. But you can tell it, you can tell that they're preparing. They're already entering there. This holds less, and this holds beauty, truth, and God. I want to suggest that that's what's going on in this prayer of Jesus. He's moving across time because time has no meaning in eternity. He could slip there, slip back. Go there, come here, wherever here is. When he prays for his church, when he prays for his disciples, make no bones, He's praying for you. He's praying for you, He's praying for me, He's praying for all of us. And that prayer has already been answered.

Amen.