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Peace, Sun Prairie
Maundy Thursday
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John 17:24-26

CHRIST'S HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

What a strange year! Dear Peace Family, on this Maundy Thursday I'm going to ask you to ponder a sobering question with me. Could it be said that God in a sense has taken away from us the celebration of Holy Week to discipline us? Could it be said that God has deprived us of the most high celebration, the celebration of those key events that make up the very heart of the Gospel message, because we Christians have taken it too much for granted and have allowed ourselves to become too absorbed in the culture of the world? Has spiritual apathy rendered us to be bland, ineffectual salt that has lost its saltiness? Throughout the Old Testament the harshest and scariest judgment of God on Israel was when He sent them no prophet or if worship at the temple came to a halt. The book of Ecclesiastes says, *When times are good, give thanks. When times are bad, pause to consider: God has made the one as well as the other.* We would be wise to understand that more than coronavirus is going on here. God is calling us out that we might repent.

Fortunately, we have someone perfect to represent us before God in the person of Jesus Christ. In His Christly role as High Priest, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone to God for our guilt. Even now Jesus still fulfills His role as our High Priest by pleading with the Father on our behalf.

Throughout this season of Lent we have been meditating on Christ's High Priestly prayer written out in John chapter 17 which He offered in the upper room on the night He instituted the Lord's Supper. It gives us an understanding of Christ's concerns for us, what kinds of things He regards as important as He speaks to the Father on our behalf. Tonight, let's drink in the concluding words of Christ's prayer that evening.

Thus far we have heard Christ pray for our preservation, our sanctification, our unification. And tonight He prays for our glorification. Starting at verse 24 of John 17, Jesus said, *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see my glory—the glory you gave me because you loved me before the world's foundation.*

That's the end goal, Christ's goal for us—that we get to see His glory in heaven, that we get to see Him fully for who He is. While Christ was here on earth the disciples only saw Him in humble form, not in His glory. Even during the 40 days Jesus remained with His disciples after He rose from the dead, He still appeared to them not in full glory but in a humble form that they could tolerate. You and I have only met Christ in the form of humble words and water and bread and wine. But we're really no worse off than the disciples in this way. Just like us, they believed in a glorified Christ they didn't see.

There's a certain intimacy about that, isn't there? For example, who knows you better than your spouse? You let your spouse get to know you and see you better than anyone else in the world. Jesus' glory, shall we say His full identity, is masked to the world. But He wants you to know Him fully. The Bible says, *We know that when He is revealed we will be like Him and we will see Him as He really is.*

Even if that's all that heaven is, just to be a spectator and see Jesus, the eternal Son of God, that will in no way be a let-down. We don't mind being mere spectators at a Badgers' game or a movie theater. We become engrossed in what's happening. When we are spectators at our 12-year-old's oboe recital, we are bursting with pride. When we are finally without sin and able to love our Lord perfectly, it will be the ultimate fulfillment, our ultimate meaning and purpose and gladness realized, merely to behold Jesus our Lord in His everlasting glory.

Isn't it a wonder that He so wants you and me to be with Him in glory He even speaks to the Father about it? There is plenty of time that I don't like being around me very much. But that's grace and it shows us His amazing love.

Which is how He concludes His prayer—that in the meantime we might know and experience the love of the Father, and having experienced it, we might become like Him as givers of His divine love. Jesus prayed, *Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these men knew that you sent me. I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have for me may be in them and that I may be in them.*”

Jesus revealed the Father's love for us by what He did—that the Father was willing to sacrifice His perfect and eternal Son on the cross to atone for our sins, that Jesus was willing to suffer the most gruesome, most horrifying damnation to give us a future of joy. What kind of profound love must that be?

And He does not cease to make His Father's love known to us. Even if our full celebration of Holy Week has been withheld from us as an act of His discipline, He nevertheless still reaches out to us, still invites us to turn to Him in repentance and faith, still offers us His forgiveness and peace.

In fact, this is why He instituted the Holy Supper on that Maundy Thursday evening, why He also gave us the new command to love one another. He did not leave us with a philosophy, a religious regimen or a speculative, mental exercise. Rather, He makes us know His love. In the Sacrament we gain the experience not only of being loved but also of becoming conduits of love, and in this way gain a foretaste of what His heavenly glory is all about.

Christ is your High Priest. As High Priest, He is constantly praying to the Father about you. In Him we get to meet God. Through Him we get to approach God. Because of Him we can be confident of God's gracious “yes.”