

Rev. Ellen Dawson | June 2, 2019 | FOX CHAPEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
John 17:20-26 | "So That the World May Know"

20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, 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 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

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A few months ago, columnist Ron Charles wrote an article for The Washington Post entitled "The 23 most unforgettable last sentences in fiction," for a special feature in the paper's Arts & Entertainment section. I came across the article as I was looking for recommendations for my ever-growing summer reading list.

He writes: "...most [books] don't end truthfully or artfully, but there are rare exceptions: novels that conclude with such gracefully calibrated language that we close the back cover and feel physically imprinted, as though the words were pressed into us by a weight we can hardly fathom. The rest is silence. Some of those great final lines remain markers of our favorite novels, holy relics of our most cherished reading experiences. Others enter into the language, take on a life of their own, and eclipse their source."¹

His point? Endings make an impact. They often summarize the entire theme of the novel. The last lines leave a lasting impression.

Here are a few that you may recognize:

"And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless us, Every One" - *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens -- that was an easy one!

"After all, tomorrow is another day." - *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

"I'm so glad to be at home again!" - *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum

¹ Ron Charles, Feb 14 2019. Article available at:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/entertainment/books/best-last-lines/?utm_term=.9bf6e36550e7

Many of us know these words because they were a part of a required reading list. Others may have picked up these books to read for fun. Or, we just know these lines because they simply are famous - known - and they have become a part of our culture through movies or plays or even just applications to things in our everyday lives.

But know this - in all cases, the author wanted to make sure the last line had significance. Writing coaches and book editors often encourage authors to consider the impact of those last lines, those last few words. The words again have an affect, make an impression, and summarize the story's whole meaning -- the point and purpose of the story.

Well, in today's passage, we are in the book of John, Chapter 17, where Jesus prays: he is interceding for his disciples. In these verses, we are actually jumping in at the end, turning to the last bit of Jesus's prayer, so to speak. So it's almost like we are doing something that I can't fathom -- we are reading the last page first! And I hope and pray this will give us some important insights.

Note: these are not his famous last lines that he spoke as he died on the cross. Remember....Jesus also spoke to his disciples after the resurrection, before ascending into heaven, giving them words of peace, hope, and instruction.

But I still want us to focus on these words -- the last section of Jesus' prayer -- because they too are important, impactful, and purposeful. But are these words, like the last lines of other best-selling books...are the words in this prayer of Jesus Christ famous, memorable, cherished?

The prayer in John 17 comes after Jesus has told the apostles that the time for him to leave them is coming. And, it precedes his betrayal and arrest, before he enters the Garden of Gethsemane. So, this occurs on Maundy Thursday - the night in which Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper! Seeing as today is a Sunday on which we celebrate communion, I thought it was important for us to recognize that.

To better understand the ending I think we need to do a quick review of the other 19 verses. I invite you all to take some time this week to read the entire prayer - chapter 17 of John. This prayer is a prayer for his disciples, and according to commentator F. Dale Bruner, this prayer is a summary of "Jesus' major concerns for his disciples and the world." Bruner actually parallels this prayer with The Lord's Prayer -- calling the prayer in John 17 The Lord's Lords prayer. I would love to teach more about this today, but instead, I also invite and encourage you to read the Lord's prayer line by line and look for the places where this prayer of Jesus is similar! Overall, Jesus prays for the Lord to be glorified, for his disciples to be kept centered in the truth of Christ, he prays for their protection from evil, and for their sanctification - which is a fancy way of saying 'may they be set apart, made holy, for service in the kingdom of God.'

According to M.J. Laagrange, in this prayer, we see that Jesus desires 3 things: He prays that the Church will be 1 - apostolic, or sent; and 2 - holy. The 3rd thing? We will get to that...

But first, in verses 20-26, what you may notice first is that this prayer is about us.

Bruner writes, "So now, after praying for his original apostolic disciples, Jesus prays in the concluding seven verses for all present and future believers of the apostolic message. It is comforting, first of all, simply to know that Jesus has here already specifically prayed for all future believers. And since Jesus' prayers are so strong and effective, we can take comfort in this fact: Jesus has already prayed for us, too. Which should mean: We will make it."

So are you encouraged by this? That Jesus prayed for us? I sense hope, comfort, peace.

But, here's the thing I am challenged by in this part of the prayer: This is the question -- Are we, here, today, living as answers to Christ's prayer for us?

The great missiologist Lesslie Newbigin says "This prayer leads us into the very heart of the ministry and message of Jesus." And yet, and yet - we are not familiar with this prayer! We are more familiar with the last lines of secular novels!

So let's look at these verses. How does Jesus summarize and end his time in prayer? What is the 3rd thing Jesus desires for the Church? Unity.

In verse 20-26 alone, you can count the word "one" 5 times. Multiple times we hear Jesus talk about the unity of him with his Father - the connection - the relationship.

This echoes the I Am statement in John 15: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

He prays for us to be one - to be unified - as he and his Father are unified.

Oh, brothers and sisters, we've got a lot of work to do.

The kind of unity Jesus prays for and desires for us, his disciples, is for our unity with Him, and therefore, with his Father. Bruner writes, "This is a devotional, worshipful, eucharistic, vertical relation first of all. The Father is so locked into the Son, that he seeks his Son's glory more than anything else in the world; the Son, similarly, seeks the Father's glory above all else; now we, comparably, are invited into this divine intercommitment. May we find ways into this upward devotion, ways that will be as individual and as unique as each

Christian person, for the sake of the Church's outward reach into the wide world around us."

You see, in order for us to be living as answers to Christ's prayer for us - as sent, holy, and most of all, unified followers, we have to first recognize where we are not connected. Where we are missing the link. But also where we are convinced that Jesus is just as locked into us - his Church - his body.

Now, this is not an invitation to criticize our denomination, our congregation, our differences in doctrine or politics or practices. No, that would actually defeat the purpose of God's Word for us today -- and I think that would be wayyyyyy too easy.

What Christ is calling us to do - what he prayed for on the night of his betrayal and arrest - was for us to focus on our relationship with Him. As Bruner says, "we are invited into this divine intercommitment." But how committed are you? How committed are you? Are we?

Look at what Jesus Prays for us --

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Do you believe that Jesus gives you glory? That you are interconnected with the Father as his beloved child? That you are so interconnected with Jesus and so loved that you and we as a united body have a purpose of showing that love -- so that the world may know?

No matter where you are - who you are - what you have done - what you are doing - how much you pray - how often you miss church - who you have hurt - how the church has hurt you -- Know this: As Jesus realized he was going to die, he decided to get down on his knees and pray. For you. For me. YES! The Word of God put into words his praise, his hope, his love for us - for his church - for the entire world.

And that love is made known to us through and in and because of Jesus Christ, the Son, our Lord.

So what are we to do as a response to this prayer, this lesson, this Truth?

First, I invite you to read and perhaps even memorize these verses. Put them on your heart. Print them out and stick them on the bathroom mirror. Write them on a piece of paper and carry them with you -- as a reminder that Jesus prayed for us and for you -- as a reminder that Jesus continues to intercede for us and for you -- as a new famous last line that I am hoping will catch on as those lines from well-known novels.

Second, I invite you to pray and intercede for our congregation. For the churches here in our community. For the catholic - which means universal - church. For all denominations and followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew even then that unity in the church would be necessary and it would be hard. When we disagree, criticize, and choose to only see “our way” instead of listening with compassion or considering other opinions - we let evil win. We pretty much make it easy as pie for sin to creep in....for Satan to gain control. I truly believe that. So yes, we believe in the victory of Jesus and that light always overcomes the darkness. But in this day and age, we can't ignore the fact that Satan still wants to have the upper hand. And I would say even though we know the ending -- through the prophets and revelation of John of Patmos -- we know ultimately the Alpha and the Omega will prevail -- we still need to pray and intercede for the Body of Christ here and now. So do it.

Finally, you are invited to evaluate your relationships -- those that are interconnected vertically with Christ and God the Father -- and those that are here on this level, with your family, community, church. What are you doing to build and grow your relationship with Christ? How do you define your relationships with people around you? As Bruner explained, we are talking about “devotional, worshipful, eucharistic,” relationships.

Devotional relationships - what do those look like? Well, when you devote yourself to something you give it more of your time, energy, and attention. Start with your devotion to Christ. Let Chris, or Tara or me know if you need guidance on how to do this. Personal devotion to Christ as exercised in silence, prayer, reading of scripture, fasting -- I've seen people's lives be transformed through such practices.

Then look at worshipful relationships - what does worship mean to you? Is it just here on Sunday or do you worship in other ways? Do you “get” why we sing - why it's important for us to pray together - what it is about our time in worship together that pretty much gets us equipped and sent out into the world. Worship takes many forms, and I encourage you to explore how you could grow in your understanding of worship here at this church. You know, one of my favorite quotes is from John Piper who wrote a book on mission called “Let the Nations be Glad.” And well, you may be surprised to hear this from me, your mission pastor - but he writes, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.”

And finally, I invite you to the Eucharistic relationship which we celebrate today. The eucharist is about us as the body and about our connectedness to Christ! He gives his body and blood for us. We celebrate this sacrament to remember Christ's sacrifice for us. So today, when you come forward please, don't feel rushed. Let the servers truly serve you - they offer you the body of christ and the cup of salvation - consider what that means. Maybe instead of eating the bread and juice right away, take it back to your seat and think

about how that piece of bread and few drops of juice connects you to Christ - to the God of the Universe - to the presence of the Holy Spirit - and to everyone here in this service - and to all believers around the world. Mind blowing! And beautiful and comforting and powerful. That's what this eucharistic relationship is all about.

Today we have not read words of a novel. We have read the words that Jesus himself prayed. And for these words and that prayer may we be ever thankful. Ever encouraged. Ever moved to be more and more committed in our union with Christ.

As Matthew Henry concludes for our conclusion: "Let us therefore make sure of our union with Christ, and then take the comfort of his intercession. *This* prayer had an end, but that - his constant intercession - he ever lives to make."

And it is for our sake and so that the world may know Him.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.