

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

John 17:1-11

Year A - Easter 7, Text: John 17:1-11

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In his Gospel, John makes no reference to Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. However, in John 17, we read of Jesus praying in the Upper Room prior to going to a garden (18:1). Since the sixteenth century, the contents of John 17 have been referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer — a prayer in which Jesus speaks directly to His Father as an intercessor, although no doubt the disciples heard what Jesus was saying. In this chapter, Jesus prays for Himself in relation to His approaching crucifixion (17:1–5), His immediate disciples (v. 6–19), and His future disciples (v. 20–24). One might ask why those who determined the content of this set of pericopes divided this chapter as they did.

- The historical context is as follows: Jesus' visible ministry on earth is now all but over. Although He had previously called the disciples to follow Him (13:33, 36), He now prays that they will be with Him in union with the Father (v. 12–14). The prayer highlights the unity of the Father, the Son, and the believing community. What precedes this passage in John's larger framework?
- Jesus reveals His Person and mission to His own people (chs. 1–11). No one seems to understand Jesus' message, and, after He raises Lazarus from the dead on the Mount of Olives (11:1–44), the religious and political leaders plot to kill Him (11:45–56).
- In 12:31, Jesus declares that He is about to conquer the kingdom of Satan. This verse has profound implications for the world still today. God's people are to be aware of the continuing presence of the "satanic liar" and the demonic goals that he would have humanity pursue.
- In chs. 13–16, Jesus focuses on demonstrating the true nature of His Servant-Kingdom. He washes feet (something that only a Gentile slave would do!), emphasizing that the law's goal for our interpersonal dealings is summed up the command to

"love one another" (as Paul says in Galatians 5:14).

- Jesus also assures His disciples that, after He withdraws His visible presence, the Holy Spirit will continue to make His message known (which stresses our continuing need to soak ourselves in the study of God's Word so that the Holy Spirit can continue to communicate with us).
- The Holy Spirit is Jesus' Interpreter. The Spirit seeks only to share Jesus' message with humanity and to involve them in Jesus' continuing ministry and mission. The "textbook" is the Bible. If we pray "Holy Spirit, speak to me," we commit ourselves to study God's Word, regularly and passionately. If we do not listen to the Holy Spirit, we listen to the "unholy spirit," Satan. There is no middle or neutral ground! Life is about either "servant-hood" or "serpent-hood."

Commentary

Verse 17:1: When praying, Jesus looks up to the heavens and uses the term Father. Jesus' coming "glory" will consist in giving away His life on a cross — the ultimate act of the ultimate Servant! Here, note 19:30. The word hour has sounded like a muffled bell numerous times prior to ch. 17; it is used 20 times in John's Gospel, most times referring to Jesus' coming crucifixion (or coronation). It is now about to sound forth loudly and clearly in Jesus' enthronement on a cross. Jesus' definition of glory is the reverse of that embraced by the world-at-large. Jesus devoted life to giving Himself; human nature devotes life to gaining for self. The events of Jesus' coming hour will complete His revelation of His Father's heart and will.

Verse 17:2: Eternal life is not only the realm that God's people will eventually enter. It is also a servant lifestyle that they are to practice already in this life. God's people are to live now as they will then in the life to come. Jesus' message is, "My Father's eternal kingdom has already broken in — in and through Me!

Enter it! Participate in it!”

Verse 17:3: Jesus nowhere else refers to Himself as Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah).

Verses 17:4–5: God’s (and Jesus’) glory is not merely of recent origin. It is eternal, beyond the limits of time. Jesus demonstrates the life that God intended (and still desires) humanity to live.

Verse 17:6: “Your name” is perhaps the name I Am (8:24, 28, 58, 13:19). The mission of Jesus was to know and show His invisible Father.

Verses 17:7–8: Positive words — but the disciples began to catch on fully only after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension.

Verses 17:9–11: Jesus prays that the disciples will be bound in unity with a bond like that which binds the Father and Jesus together. A profound thought with profound implications! If only we could place above all church altars (in addition to those beautiful polished crosses) an image of Jesus on His knees washing the disciples’ feet — with perhaps the subtitle, “As I — so you.”