

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Tammy McLeod, Harvard Chaplain and the Director of College Ministries at Park Street Church. We're grateful to have her with us this morning.

Please rise as you're able and join in our responsive Psalm reading number 22 in your Black Psalter. "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? Why are thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

Congregation:

Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

Elizabeth Propst:

Yet thou are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Congregation:

In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

Elizabeth Propst:

To thee they cried and were saved, in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.

Congregation:

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

Elizabeth Propst:

But thou, oh Lord, be not far off; o thou my help, hasten to my aid.

Congregation:

Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dogs.

Elizabeth Propst:

Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen.

Congregation:

I will tell of your name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.

Elizabeth Propst:

For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hid His face from him, but has heard when he cried to Him.

Choir:

(Singing)

Tammy McLeod:

Good morning. It's great to meet with you. Since this is Holy Week, my text for today is taken from Jesus' Farewell Prayer, John 17:20 through 21. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. What does God want to do for you, for me, for us? In the 17th chapter of the Fourth Gospel, John retells a story of a prayer that he overheard Jesus pray in the final week of his earthly ministry. His prayer begins with a provocative phrase, "The time has come." In John's gospel, Jesus uses a similar phrase repeatedly, but in the negative. For example, when His mother calls on him at a wedding to do a miracle, He says, "My time has not yet come."

When His brothers encourage him to go to Jerusalem for publicity purposes, He again says, "The right time has not yet come." Twice, He narrowly escapes being killed by His opponent because His time had not yet come, but here hours before He is arrested, tried, mocked, beaten, stripped, humiliated, and tortured to death on a Roman cross, He announces in His prayer to His father, "The time has come." This is the pinnacle moment of the life and ministry of Jesus in this world. Jesus declares that what He is about to do is the centerpiece of why He came, the centerpiece of cosmic history. This makes the words of this prayer a profound and clear articulation of what He wants, what He came to do, what He wants for himself, His disciples, and for us. What does Jesus want? The prayer is broken into three sections. In the first section, He prays for himself to be returned to the glorious state of union with the Father that He had willingly relinquished in order to accomplish the task.

In the second section, He prays for His disciples, that they may be one even as we are one. In the third section from which I read, Jesus prays for us. I will read the opening text again. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. What does God want for us? What was the aim and purpose of His becoming flesh and dwelling among us, laying down His life For us? God's will and purpose for our lives is that we experience the same loving union with God and with other believers that God, the Father, experiences with Jesus, the son of God.

How are we doing at this? How are we doing at being one with one another, experiencing communion and union with each other the way the Father communes with the son? Clearly, it's not going so well. Of the words we could use to describe the state of the world, country, communities, churches, or families, I would probably not choose the words oneness, loving, communion, or unity. I would be more likely to use the exact opposite of those words, conflicted, divided, fractured, polarized, isolated. In America, we are in the middle of historic social fragmentation and political polarization, which makes this prayer more relevant than ever. What is perhaps most important for us to ponder today is not simply that Jesus prayed for this, but that the community that formed around Jesus embodied this unity. Consider how startling it must have been to encounter this diverse community of people who became a part of Jesus' discipleship community.

It included both men and women, the morally upright Nathaniel and the morally compromised Peter, a formerly demon possessed woman named Mary, and the wife of one of the highest ranking managers in King Herod's Court, Joanna, Jewish zealots who were ready to rid Israel of its Roman occupiers violently, and Roman sympathizers like Matthew, who was actually collecting taxes from his own people for the Roman oppressors. The very fact that this diverse and conflicted aggregate of individuals could gather for a single meal is remarkable in itself, but the thought that they shared countless meals and sleeping quarters as they traveled over 2000 miles together on foot for nearly three years is mind-blowing. I want to close by inviting you to pray with me that we would live out Jesus' prayer for our unity. Let's pray.

God, thank you for sending your son Jesus into this world. Thank you, Jesus, for laying down Your life for us. Thank you for Your forgiveness, for reconciling the whole world to Yourself and making all things new. As You have forgiven us, help us to forgive others. Thank you for pouring Your love out into our hearts, through Your spirit who lives within us. Empower us to love the way You love us, that we would all be one so that the world may believe that you have sent Jesus. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise and embody your spirit for the Lord's prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join in our closing hymn, My Faith Looks Up to Thee, number 155 in your crimson hymnal book.

My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine. Now hear me while I pray; take all my guilt away; O let me from this day, be wholly thine! May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart; my zeal inspire! As thou hast died for me, oh, may my love to thee, pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire! While life's dark maze I tread, and griefs around me spread, be thou my guide. Bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrow's tears away, nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

Christ has no hands in this world, but your hands, and no voice in this world but your voice, so may our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.