

Thankful Memorial, Chattanooga
May 29, 2022
Year C, Easter 7, Sunday after Ascension
Eavesdropping on God
The Rev. Leyla King

Acts 16:16-34
Psalm 97
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21
John 17:20-26

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

There is a rather peculiar pleasure that one gets from eavesdropping. If you've ever had the opportunity, accidentally or purposefully, or accidentally-on-purpose, to overhear a conversation, you know what I mean. People are much more honest about their thoughts and feelings in a private tete-a-tete with a friend than they are in more public conversations, and so there's something a bit thrilling about the intimacy of eavesdropping. How often do we really get to hear such raw honesty from others?

Prayer is also a conversation, a tete-a-tete between the pray-er and God. You talk to God as you would talk to your most trusted friend. And sometimes our prayers involve other people – what we like or dislike about them, what we fear from them or what we hope for them. So, when you hear someone else pray for you, you might feel a bit like an eavesdropper, overhearing someone else's conversation with God that is all about you! about the pray-er's most honest wishes and thoughts and fears and hopes for you. And that is often a very humbling and awkward and wonderful and privileged thing to overhear.

So, be prepared to feel that striking combination of awe and awkwardness, because this morning we are invited to eavesdrop on a prayer between the incarnate Word and the Creator. And this most intimate conversation between divine Father and divine-become-human Son is all about us, about you and me and all of Christ's disciples.

The passage from John's gospel this morning comes on the heels of the long wisdom-filled goodbye Jesus has with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. We've been hearing portions of this "farewell discourse" for the past three weeks. But, having told his disciples everything he wants to tell them on this significant night, Jesus turns to God and offers intercession, letting his disciples overhear his prayer.

It is a prayer filled with all the hopes and wishes and thoughts and desires Jesus has for us. He prays:

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 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... Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 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."

Perhaps the precise meaning gets a little lost in the poetry of Jesus' prayer, but ultimately, Jesus prays that we will be taken up into the relationship that he has with God the Father, that the same knowledge of God that Christ has will become our knowledge of God, that the love that is shared between divine Father and Son will extend into our hearts and our minds, that we will be known and

loved by God as fully as Jesus is known and loved and that we will know and love God and one another as Christ has loved us. It is a prayer that invites us, the eavesdroppers, into the very heart of the Trinitarian God.

And Jesus' prayer thousands of years ago is still being answered today. Even right now, we are always being caught up into the love of God, always being invited in to the divine relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And we hear Jesus' prayer, that first invitation into the love of the Trinitarian God, at a very precise moment in the liturgical cycle of our Christian year. Last Thursday, the Church celebrated Ascension Day, the day upon which Christ "took our human nature into heaven where he now reigns with the Father and intercedes for us."¹ But, we will not celebrate Pentecost, the day that remembers the arrival of the Holy Spirit until *next* Sunday. So *this* Sunday, as we eavesdrop on this conversation between Father and Son, we find ourselves in a moment in the church year that in many ways represents our own lived reality and experience of God.

For, we know Jesus lives, that his prayer for us is being answered and that we are already being caught up into the shared love of the Trinity. But we only have to look around us to know that the Spirit's work in the world is not yet complete, that we are not yet all one in the knowledge and love of God. We only have to see the faces and read the names of children and teachers and grocery-shoppers and church-goers dead in Texas and New York and California to know that this broken world still longs for the fullness of the Spirit's arrival. We only have to hear the meager excuses of those in power for why they act and fail to act in ways that will prevent such horrors, to know that all people are not yet filled with the divine love that prioritizes others' needs before our own.

So, today, between Ascension and Pentecost, as we ache and rage at the brokenness of a world between Christ's first coming and the final one, we find ourselves in the very center of a prayer that has been going on for thousands of years. It is a prayer between Father and Son, between God and the people of God, between all of creation and its Creator, and it is a prayer uttered most succinctly in the last words of the book of Revelation: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come[...] The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

That one word, "Come," that we hear again and again, in the reading from Revelation, echoes in our lives of faith as we continually respond to the invitation into love of Jesus' prayer for us and take up his mission of making that love known throughout the world, in the face of all its tragedy and heartbreak. God calls out to us, "come," inviting us into the divine relationship; and we respond, saying, "come," asking God into our hearts and minds, longing for the Spirit to strengthen and enlighten us. And God says again to us, "come," offering to us the knowledge and love of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, and we respond saying, "come," praying for the abundant life in Christ. And God says to us, "Let anyone who is thirsty come," and we, thirsting after God, cry out, "come." And God says to us, "Surely I am coming soon." And we respond in the prayer of all creation, "Come, Lord Jesus." Thus, and only thus, can we move forward in faith towards the God of Love, even as God comes to meet us where we are. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

¹ "Outline of the Faith," *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 850