



Roanoke, Virginia

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***“Sent”***

*John 17:6-19*

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We find ourselves this morning in Jesus’ farewell to his disciples in John’s gospel. This is a “long goodbye” as Jesus prepares for his departure and prepares his followers, his closest followers the disciples, for his departure as well. This long goodbye began way back in chapter 13 with the foot-washing scene as they gathered for one last meal together and concludes here in chapter 17 with prayer. Jesus has cleansed and has given a new commandment of love; Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit and has promoted abiding as the vine and branches. Jesus has warned of the world’s hate and has assured sorrow will become joy once more. Jesus has given his peace and has given his prayer. And that is where we find ourselves this morning. We are listening to Jesus pray to God, his Father, the only true God. Let us listen in—as the disciples did that day—as we hear Jesus’ prayer in John 17:6-19.

<sup>6</sup>“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost



except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup> I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Today we celebrate our seniors, the senior class of 2021. I can bet, much like the farewell we have in John, this past month and even past year or more has been a “long good-bye”. I remember, as my high-school graduation grew closer and closer, things became more and more important for me and for my parents. I am the second child, the youngest, and so my senior year I was by myself at home. With my brother already in college, dinners became meaningful, soccer games became something to treasure, the small moments at home were the moments my parents wanted to hold onto. However...my senior year did not involve virtual at-home schooling, or the whole family having to be quarantined in the house together for different periods of time. I don't know about you and your family, but my family would have had a different understanding of “graduation” if we experienced the same senior year as you have. My parents might have jumped for joy as they graduated to “empty nesters,” as they gained their freedom once more from Saturday sports and weekday practices. No longer would my parents have to juggle three or even four different calendars and schedules to make sure everyone was where they needed to be at the right time, and for you all on top of that juggle the in-person and virtual nature of those calendars. So, to see you all here today, both parents and students, overcoming the testing and trials, the uncertainty and uniqueness of your journey to this point, I for one will say well done! We are so proud of you!

Graduation usually comes with gifts being given, as we did earlier, either as a congratulations or as a keepsake as we move into the next chapter of life. Gifts mark moments of transition, moments of celebration or change. But gifts not only mark moments of importance, I think more importantly, gifts mark moments of love. No matter the gift being given, gifts are expressions of love. And both God and Jesus are the ultimate gift-givers.

The verb *give* occurs 17 times in this chapter of John alone, by far more than in any other chapter in the New Testament. It is used nine times in our reading for today, and the uses of the verb can summarize the central motif of the prayer like this: The Father *gives* the Son authority over all flesh to *give* eternal life to all whom God has *given* to him. God has *given* the Son work to do. But more importantly in our selection for today, it is those whom God has *given* Jesus from the world whose work is central. They, the disciples, were first the Father's own but now are Jesus' own, who has *given* them words of the Father as the Word from the Father. Jesus came to *give* life to those who have been *given* to him. And so, this is a prayer for them, the disciples, the gifted and the given ones.



First, the disciples are the gifted. The disciples have been given the good news, by word and deed, through signs and sermons, through intimate moments and through public miracles. These giving moments of wisdom and knowledge are signs of love. In witnessing and in believing, they have been drawn into the love of Father and Son, into the *given-ness* that began with God. The opening verses of John's gospel may sound like this through the lens of gift giving: God gave the world life; God gave creation, creation. And then God gave creation the Son, who was there in the beginning and who gave life in the beginning. And creation was *given* Jesus. God *gave* Jesus the world and God *gave* the world Jesus.

Another gift the disciples were given was their calling. They were called to follow, and in being called they were sent as Jesus was sent. God *sent* Jesus into the world to call people to repent and believe in him, to call back the world to God, to embody the love of God. He was sent to testify to the Truth. And now Jesus is *sending* the disciples out into the world. Again, this is an act of love. Giving is in love, and now the sending is in love. Yet the love-sending is directed toward the object—Jesus and the disciples were sent to the world. The object of love is the world. “For God so loved the world, God gave the only Son...For God so loved the world, God sent the only Son.” The divine love is now directed to the world—this the place where the sent are sent.

The disciples are sent into the world to testify to the Truth in a world that rejects the Truth. It is the world that God loved so much that Jesus was sent; yet it is the world that hated and rejected Jesus. Still, love remained. The world of God's creation is the arena of God's loving, saving initiative in the sending of the Son. This world, the world where the divine mission is opposed and rejected, is the object of divine love. And this is the same world that will continue to be opposed when Jesus departs, as he hands over the kingdom-reigns to his Spirit-led followers.

That is what is at stake for the disciples Jesus sends, and that is why Jesus prays deeply for them. Protect them, Father. Sanctify them, he prays. Send them, God. Jesus' mission is coming to fulfilment, and now the disciples must fulfil theirs. They will be rejected, opposed, and persecuted, as Jesus was, because the world's values are not kingdom values... it will be a tough sell. So, Jesus prays for them. Protect them in your name. Sanctify them in the truth that is being rejected.

And Jesus continues, “I speak these things in the world, so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.” Jesus prays for them and sends them in love; in and through his love their joy may be made complete.

Joy completed. We have heard this earlier in the gospel; as Jesus teaches of abiding love he says, “I have spoken these things to you, so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” The protection, the sanctification, the sending, the prayer—is for joy to be rendered complete. It is not our own joy that is the conclusion of love. Completed joy is Christ's joy in us... and our joy is then complete. Christ's joy in us.

To put it another way, we discover joy when our lives bring joy to God.



As we were on our hike up Mill Mountain to the Star last weekend, we started talking about Disney movies. I was asking if anyone wanted to sing their favorite Disney tune as we marched through the woods. No one wanted to be the lead singer. We talked about the movies though, and I brought up Moana. What a great movie! Valerie and I first watched Moana a few summer ago, and I am not exaggerating...we watched it over 20 times that summer. The movie is great, and the songs are so catchy... y'all remember this one: "What can I say except you're welcome"—what about the catchy refrain "I'm so shinaaayyy" —you can sing along— "I'm so shinaaayyy"?

The story of Moana is a beautiful one about a young girl seeking her call. Moana journeys on a daring mission to save her people. Moana is the daughter of the village chief and will one day take on that role herself, becoming chief of the village of Montonui. Yet from childhood Moana is drawn to something beyond her isolated village. In the opening song as her father tells her, "The village of Montonui is all you need, it's okay to be happy right where you are," she is constantly wandering to the shores as if something is pulling her there. The story continues as her dad begins to teach her the ways of her people, and the skills needed to be chief in the future—and this does not include sailing past the reef into the deep ocean waters. But, with such a great storyline as this, that is precisely where Moana feels called: out into the deep waters. She learns her village suffering is caused by the demigod Maui who stole the heart of the goddess Te Fiti. She answers the Ocean's call to embark on an epic journey to restore the heart of Te Fiti and to restore her land and people.

Now I am sure we can all think of movies like this. The main character sets out on an epic adventure to fulfil their calling and identity. But what is so prominent in Moana is the idea of identity and calling. She doesn't abandon her identity as future village chief; she creates from her identity a deeper understanding of who she is.

God has given each one of us, each one of you, a unique calling. Just as Moana's and the disciples' call began in their towns and in their villages, yours, too, began here. It began in your identity as a beloved child of God. You have been loved by God. You have been set apart and grafted to the body of Christ in baptism; you have been confirmed as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. And you have been sent on missions from here to Kentucky to care for those who cannot care for themselves. You have been sent to the Dominican Republic, to transform lives through love in Bible School and hard work. Your identity as a child of God has been nurtured here. Your call begins in your identity as a beloved child of God.

(Cue the Mission Impossible soundtrack.) Your mission: you are being sent out into the world. You do not belong to the world, just as Jesus does not belong to the world. But the world is your mission. You are sent to testify to the truth. Your mission is to take the love you have known in Jesus Christ to the world, to the dark places of fear and hate, to the ones who share in our brokenness as human beings. It is there joy is found, and where joy may be complete—in you and in the world—because you have brought joy to God.



Like Moana and the disciples, you are now drawn into something bigger. It is time to set out and continue your epic journey of your calling as a child of God: to bring joy to God and embody that joy in the world.

It will be difficult. It was hard for the disciples. And Moana, she was ready to turn back and give up, but the spirit of her grandma appeared and said:

“Sometimes the world seems against you; The journey may leave a scar; But scars can heal and reveal just; Where you are...

The people you love will change you; The things you have learned will guide you; And nothing on Earth can silence; The quiet voice still inside you...

And when that voice starts to whisper; "Moana, you've come so far,"  
Moana, listen; Do you know who you are?"

Friends, do you know who you are? You are a child of God—gifted and given; called and sent—and loved.

As you respond to God’s calling and sending, as you encounter struggles in this crazy world in which we are to love and serve, as you wrestle with your own faults and failures and questions of faith, as you stand up and witness to the truth of the gospel, embodying the very union of God and Jesus, remember Jesus prays for you. Just as he prayed for the disciples, Jesus still prays for you.

As Jesus prayed for his disciples he sent into the world, Seniors, I leave you with this prayer, as you are sent into the world:

O God, your name is known by these students, the ones you gave this church. They were yours in the beginning, created from the dust and given the breath of life through your Son. You knew them before their birth and set them apart to bring you joy and embody Christ’s joy in the world. In Christ they have life, the life that really is life, the eternal life you have promised. In Christ they know the truth of your Word. We can no longer shepherd them here in this place, for they are journeying to the next chapter of life. And so, I ask, on their behalf, that you, the God of all time and space, as this church has done up to this point, protect them, nurture them, be with them as they are now sent into this world. May they be changed, and may the world be changed through them. Plant them beside streams of your living water, make them fruitful in your grace, and strong to withstand the troubled winds of the world to be the light in darkness, the hope for despair, and joy for sorrow. Send them into this world with the power of your love to spread the joy known in Christ, so that all the world may find unity in your name, and all joy may be complete.

Amen.

