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Our Saviour/St. Stephen
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Easter 7

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, growing up I was fortunate enough to have my grandmother on my mother's side living with our family.

My grandmother was a wonderful cook. She was an artist—she liked to paint and do ceramics.

And her bedroom was just across the hall from my bedroom, so of my three brothers and me, I was the one that got to spend the most time with her.

And I remember that I would often watch television with her in her room, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights.

We used to watch Dallas and Falcon Crest together.

We used to watch Lawrence Welk, the Love Boat, and the Muppet Show.

I was very close to my grandmother.

And I remember one time I was walking past her room in the later part of the evening, and her door was open and her light was on.

And I looked into the room and saw my grandmother sitting up in bed, with her eyes closed, and her hands folded on her lap.

And so I stopped at her door and I asked her, if she was okay?

And she replied that she was fine; that she was just praying.

And, it caught me off guard, because I didn't know my grandmother prayed.

Now, I was probably in middle school at the time, but all that time of my young life, I didn't know my grandmother prayed.

And so, I asked her what she was prayed about.

And she said that she prayed for my mom and dad, and she prayed for my brothers and me, and she prayed for other persons whom she knew needed prayer.

And I just absorbed that, and just quietly left so that she could continue with her prayers.

But that exchange gave me pause; to think that someone was praying for me.

I bring this up, because the gospel reading for today consists of a prayer.

Our Lord Jesus is here praying to God the Father, and so, of all people, Jesus is praying for us.

PAUSE

But notice in this text, Jesus does not fold his hands, close his eyes, and bow his head, and silently pray to himself, like my grandmother or anyone else we might see praying.

No, Jesus looks up to heaven, and he prays out loud this personal prayer.

Yes, the gospel writer John then gives us a glimpse through this prayer...

Yes, the gospel writer John gives us a glimpse into the thought processes of Jesus.

We can actually see into the mind of Jesus and hear then the words that Jesus prayed.

John does this by saying that Jesus looked up to heaven and said...and then we hear the words Jesus spoke.

It is such that Jesus spoke these words in the hearing of his disciples, because how else would these words have been recorded, if Jesus had prayed silently.

So, again, there is an intention here on the part of the gospel writer John to explain to the reader that Jesus prayed this prayer out loud and in the hearing of his disciples, so that we as the reader would not question how it is that the gospel writer John was able to record this prayer.

John records this prayer because again John wants us to see something within the workings of Jesus' mind.

And what we witness is what is most important in the teaching ministry of Jesus.

In essence, what we get here is Jesus' legacy.

We know what it is to have a legacy, right?

What will we be remembered for?

What mark did we leave on the world?

What impact did we make on others' lives?

And this is what Jesus then begins to talk about in this prayer—with respect to his legacy.

He says, "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world."

Now, wait. Stop right there?

What "name" are we talking about here?

Are we talking about the name "Jesus"? Which sounds quite strange for Jesus to say that to God the Father, "I have made your name known," meaning the name "Jesus."

Or, maybe Jesus is referring to the holy name of God from the Old Testament, that name being "Yahweh," which was a name so holy that it was NOT spoken, except by the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he went into the holy of holies in the Temple.

So, that sounds strange, too.

But there is another way the word "name" could be being used here.

You see, in the Old Testament the reference to one's name is more than just how a person is called.

To speak of one's name is to refer to the whole character of a person in so far as it can be known.

In other words, Jesus is saying that he has made known God's name, such that, Jesus has made known who God is, what God is all about.

And then Jesus words in this prayer become very esoteric—the meaning behind the words is mysterious, cryptic, hard to understand.

He says, “They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know everything you have given me is from you; for the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that you sent me,” so on and so forth.

But, what Jesus is getting at here is that he (Jesus) showed the disciples the true nature and the true character of God.

Jesus has brought the remote, invisible God to them.

Jesus’ supreme claim is that in him, in his person, in his ministry, he has revealed the mind, the character, and the very heart of God.

Not a bad legacy, don’t you think?

That’s a pretty good mark to leave on the world.

That’s certainly one way to make an impact upon other people—to reveal the true nature, the true character of God.

And so we can see why the gospel writer John wanted to capture this prayer in words for others to read and digest.

For again, this prayer tells us what Jesus’ ministry has been all about.

For you never really can know a person until you know what it is they pray about.

Jesus prayed for us. Jesus prayed for our well-being.

He lifted us up to God the Father, noting to God the Father that the disciples have received the message.

They have seen the very essence of God the Father in the person of Jesus Christ.

They know God in his essence—his thoughts, his dreams, his vision for his people.

PAUSE

This is actually quite remarkable if we pause long enough and see what the gospel writer John is doing here.

Because again, John takes us inside the mind of Jesus, but in truth he is taking us inside the mind of God, since to see Jesus is to see God...

The gospel writer John takes us inside the mind of God, inside that same mind that dreamed the universe.

Inside that same mind that dreamed nebulae, and star clusters, and black holes.

Inside that same mind that dreamed planets and moons, and solar systems, and life—the trees, the plants, the animals, birds, fish, and human beings.

John takes us inside that same mind of God, who in turn created our minds that we can even fathom all this.

PAUSE

Yes, I love John's Gospel because of the four gospels, his is the most philosophical, the most mind-bending, the most deep.

I mean, he starts off his whole gospel with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..."

Talk about philosophical.

So, again, here we are in this gospel reading, inside the mind of Jesus.

And simply put, the endgame of Jesus' ministry, at least what we hear in Jesus' prayer—the endgame of Jesus' ministry is that we may know God.

"I have made YOUR NAME—your nature, your character, your being-ness—I have made YOUR NAME known to those whom you gave me from the world."

PAUSE

You know, some scientists say a similar thing about why the universe exists as it does and why we are in it.

Some scientists talk about the endgame of the universe, why the universe exists at all.

And they note that initially there was just hydrogen and helium gas in the universe.

But over time, that gas condensed and formed stars.

And those stars came and went, and when those early stars imploded, they spewed out heavier elements from their cores, out into the void.

Those heavier elements then became the building blocks for planets, which then orbited around new suns.

And at least one of those planets Earth developed life, and intelligent life at that, life in the form of human beings, life that is able to ponder the universe itself.

And so, scientists say, that given enough time, the universe evolved such that we who are the star-stuff, the universe in us, or through us, has become self-aware.

The universe is able to ponder and to know itself, that is the universe's endgame.

It is similar to what John is getting at, that Jesus has made known God's name to us.

The endgame of God is to be known, to be worshipped, and to be praised.

Simple as that.

Why? Is it because God is somehow narcissistic? Somehow vainglorious? Somehow so self-centered that God can't help God's self?

No, God wants to be known because God wants to be in relationship with God's creatures.

God wants to be in relationship with us.

And that is the most profound thing of all.

That is the great mystery of God.

That the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-encompassing God—condescends to be in relationship with us.

And this is what Jesus knows too, and what we see in this prayer—Jesus knows God’s desire for relationship with us.

Which is why Jesus prays that God the Father would protect us and sanctify us.

Jesus prays that we may be kept holy, that we may be protected in God, which means to be in relationship with God.

Yes, I love this text. I love this prayer. And I love, absolutely LOVE a God who desires nothing more than to be in relationship with us.

And, to be sure, I don’t know if God built this whole beautiful, immense universe with only the purpose of creating human beings who are able to worship and praise him, and be in relationship with him.

There may be more to the universe than just that, but certainly the message in the Gospel reading today hints at that.

And certainly, some scientists would suggest as much—that the universe, and by default God, wants to be known, so as to be in relationship.

And so, Friends, what we do here on Sunday mornings each week is most important, for in this small corner of the cosmos, we are fulfilling our God-given call to know God, to worship the Almighty, and to praise his holy Name.

On this spinning, soaring world that traverses the darkness of space, we are fulfilling our calling, by knowing and praising God, and nurturing that God-human relationship.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.