

# SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “A Prayer Overheard: Love and Glory”

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**John 17:24-26**

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Today we wrap up this Lenten series going through Christ’s prayer in John 17. This prayer, the longest recorded prayer from Christ directly, finds Jesus praying directly on our behalf, interceding for us, and for that reason it’s known as the “Priestly Prayer,” that is, Jesus stepping into the role of a priest interceding to God for his people.

The close of the prayer is perhaps especially poignant for us to consider on a day like Palm (or Passion) Sunday, a day when we ironically and to our own indictment take on the role of the fickle crowd hailing Christ as king one day yet crying out for his crucifixion a few days later. Because on this day, we find Jesus praying that some of the eternal qualities of God might find a home in the hearts of those who follow him, even knowing that those who follow him will not and cannot do so faithfully on their own.

Let’s go to God’s Word together.

[Read passage, John 17:24-26.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

Faithful God, we pray for your steadfast love to be made known to us by your Word this morning. May this prayer of our Lord be heard anew, that what you want for us is nothing short of being with you in love and glory. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

Something always grabs me whenever Scripture notes “before the foundation of the world.” It’ll pop up on occasion: Paul’s letters, Revelation, Christ’s preaching. Something poetic about the phrase, I guess, but then also what it actually means, before time itself, something eternal, before creation, before any creating work was done, there’s something true, true no matter the circumstances.

Jesus, as we just heard, drops that phrase in v. 24, “before the foundation of the world.” The rest of the verse read, “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

You start parsing it out, and what Jesus is praying for is downright inspiring, monumental. He declares the love of God, the love between the Father and the Son as that which was present before the foundation of the world. And then, working backwards through the verse almost, that love, that eternal love was the reason for which the Father has given the Son glory, that is, the eternal presence, the majesty, the revealed glory of God. Then, working backwards a bit more, that glory, that eternal presence is what Jesus wants those whom God has given him, his followers, to come into, to share.

In other words, in these closing words of this prayer, Jesus prays that because of the eternal love of God, his hope is that all who follow him would be brought into knowing and sharing in the eternal presence and glory of God.

Those are some timeless things being batted around. A lot of nice-sounding words clumped together, but you start thinking about them, and it's pretty awe-inspiring. "Before the foundation of the world." This was the plan all along, no matter what wrenches we might otherwise try to throw into the gears.

I was fortunate myself to discover the answer to a timeless question a little while ago. Does the light in the fridge ever turn off? One of those core philosophical quandaries of our time. Admit it, you've wondered the same thing. And admit it, you've done the thing where you try to close the fridge really slowly to see if at the last second the light turns off while you can still see into it even just by a smidge. Or you try to open it really fast to see if there's a split second in which the door would be open but the light hasn't turned on yet.

Our fridge at home has a freezer section at the bottom, pull-out drawer sort of thing. And every so often, someone, usually after going after a popsicle or something, will leave that freezer drawer slightly open, just a little bit. Now, leaving it slightly open, creates different conditions in there. If it's all the way open, that's one thing. Doesn't matter how hard the freezer works, everything's gonna melt. But when it's just barely open, it'll create additional condensation on everything in it and freeze it. So when you open it again you can tell it was slightly open all this time because caked onto everything there's this fine layer of frost.

And that fine layer of frost will sometimes freeze around this little switch that for a while I didn't know was there. Just a small switch on a spring that, as it turns out, would turn the light on and off. When the drawer is pushed close, the switch turns the light off. When the drawer opens, the switch turns the light on. But with a fine layer of frost, the switch gets stuck, to the point that when you open the freezer drawer, the switch doesn't release to turn the light on, in turn revealing the answer to that timeless question: that the light in the fridge does in fact turn off. Because there's a switch. And I know that now.

I wonder if we sometimes approach God the same way, whether in thought, in faithfulness, or in prayer. Just something we do when the need arises. Just when we need something out of the freezer. Open it up. Oh, good, the light turns on. Got what I need. Close it back up. Light turns off. Whatever happens in between, well, that's for us.

Maybe to some of our minds, or just in what we practice, that's how we want God to operate. Just turn on when we need something. Then go back in the freezer.

But that's not what Jesus is describing here. "Before the foundation of the world." The love and glory of God being shown eternally. Before creation, before anything, there is this love and glory, as if God couldn't/wouldn't do anything but show love and glory. His presence. His grace.

Contrast the light in the freezer turning on and off to the closest thing we have to a palpable example of eternal light: the sun. Emits its light as a result of fusion of hydrogen atoms crushed together by gravity into helium atoms, releasing light, energy, warmth, etc. Now, yes, apparently they've calculated that at some point in about 5 billion years it'll start running out of hydrogen atoms, running out of fuel in other words, and then things will change. But effectively, from our perspective, it's everlasting. Doesn't matter if you can't see it. It's still going.

You go inside and close the shutters, sit in a dark room, doesn't matter. Sun's still shining. You get into a submarine and go deep into the water beyond the point of light being able to pierce through the water, the "twilight zone" as it's apparently called, doesn't matter. Sun's still shining. The world turns, as it does every day, and you can't see the sun because the face of the world is looking the other way, doesn't matter. Sun's still shining. Doesn't matter what we do or where we go or whether or not we can actually see the light of the sun shining at a given point in time, it shines nonetheless.

That's the constancy, the eternity, the power of the love and glory of God. That's what Jesus is praying about. "Because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

Then he prays for something incredible. In the last few words of the prayer, he says, "so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." Then that's the end of the prayer. No "Amen," interestingly enough. No closing conversation recorded with the disciples. Just the end of the prayer and then it says in the next chapter Jesus and his disciples get up and go to the garden where he is betrayed and deserted.

But the final words of his prayer are for the love of the Father, that eternal love, undying and constant as the sun before the foundation of the world, *that* love, *that* glory, to be in them. To be in those who would in short order be precisely the ones who would abandon him.

I don't know about you, but to hear that hope, that prayer of our Lord for them, for me, for you, on a day like Palm Sunday, when we remember how prone we are to fickleness of faith, is convicting and inspiring.

Convicting because I don't know about you, but I can quickly think of any number of instances in which my own capacity to love has not always been as undying and constant as the light of the sun, but more like the light in the freezer. Turns on and off.

But it's inspiring because we also on a day like today, we consider all those who are professing their faith as part of the Confirmation Class. And not that all of our Confirmands are now bound to demonstrate the undying, constant love of God while the rest of us are off the hook. It's that I can remember two weeks ago when our Confirmands shared before Session both their sense of faith and examples they had from their own lives that inspired their faith. The faith of sponsors, of parents, of family, of church leaders.

Can you think of someone like that? Someone in whom you sense the kind of undying, constant love and presence of God, that's shining out whether you're looking for it or not. That's the promise of a day like today. That the Lord who is faithful answers this prayer and has indeed planted the kind of love Jesus is talking about in the hearts of the faithful, and sometimes we're blessed to catch glimpses of it.

Who is that person you're thinking of? Whether you go inside and sit in a dark room, doesn't matter. Still shining. Whether you plunge yourself beyond all light and warmth, doesn't matter. Still shining. Whether the world simply turns and you feel you can't see the sun anymore, doesn't matter. Still shining.

That's the love of God, sent out before the foundation of the world, shown in time on the cross of Jesus, and given in grace by his Spirit to the hearts of those who follow him.

And if you've been blessed with a glimpse of it, don't turn the light off.

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