

*“Why did God give him authority?”*

Today’s Scripture is unique to the Gospel of John. It reports Jesus praying aloud to the Divine Parent in front of his original disciples following his last supper with them and just prior to his being betrayed and taken prisoner. Some have decided this prayer was a creation of the gospel author because of its supposed strange use of personal pronouns. For those who have made that determination, considering these verses as part of the sayings of Jesus is not necessary, nor needed, since they assume Jesus did not speak the prayer reported in our Reading.

One of the valuable aspects of the approach of many United Church of Christ congregations, including this one, is the freedom and expectation that each person will decide for his or her self how she or he evaluates Scripture and incorporates it in his or her **personal faith relationship with God**. Some of us may look at today’s Reading, as do many of the biblical academicians, especially those scholars, who have **not been part of the more contemporary study of the historicity of the Gospel of John**. Having been involved in the Society of Biblical Literature’s study of the historicity of the Gospel of John, I have come to a much different conclusion. As I indicated earlier, each of us is free to and expected to decide for her or himself the meaning of the Scriptures. So, you are certainly free to utilize my personal insights and beliefs as you deem appropriate.

Unlike the common academic view on this Scripture, I see it as a true representation of the prayer Jesus spoke out loud in front of his disciples **asking for God to help them, while revealing to those original followers more insight into his purpose and their relationship with one another, himself, and God**. The reason Jesus prayed as he did – why he used personal pronouns to refer to himself in the third person – was to enable the disciples to better comprehend his purpose and relationship to the Divine Parent, so that, they would understand the **Good News of the New Faith Relationship with God**, which Jesus was revealing to them and thus enabling them to live out.

Indeed, our Lord and Savior indicated all this early in his prayer, especially as he prayed aloud to his Divine Parent, *“For You gave him authority over all people”* [referring to himself as the one to whom this tremendous authority was given]. **Then Jesus went on to answer the question of why God had given him all of that authority – “so that he might give eternal life to all those You gave him.”**

That is Good News but what did he mean? Fortunately, he immediately defined what he meant by continuing his prayer, *“And eternal life means to know You, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom You sent.”* In other words, *“eternal life”* is being in a **close relationship with both the Divine Parent and with the Promised Messiah – Jesus Christ!** That is very different from the common understanding of *“eternal life”* of it being life after death – for this **life and relationship are ongoing** – in the present, as well as, after the conclusion of one’s mortal life.

**The implications from that revelation of Jesus’ purpose and the meaning of “eternal life” are both remarkable and Good News!** Unfortunately, because this Scripture is either frequently forgotten or disregarded it is thought of or assumed to be the creation of the gospel author, instead of Jesus’ intentional and revealing prayer to God in front of his original disciples. The Good News about *“eternal life”* being **living in a close relationship with God and Jesus** is missing in the comprehension of most people – even those, who understand themselves to be Christians. The absence of perceiving this intentional relationship with God and the Christ means Jesus’ true purpose is not so much the fulfilling of a wrathful God’s requirement for human sacrifice to bring forgiveness and life after death but, **instead, his purpose reveals the wonderful and amazing depth and breadth of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love, Forgiveness, Healing, and Reconciliation at work through him, so we might have “eternal life” – the ongoing Faith Relationship with the Divine Parent and the Messiah!**

Because the Gospel of John is frequently not studied in depth, the way Jesus went on to **reveal the nature of his extremely close Relationship with his Divine Parent and how he had been and was continuing to fulfill God’s Purpose** through his prayer in front of his original disciples is often missed and/or misunderstood. Take note how Jesus’ terminology for himself shifted from his being the *“Christ”* or *“Messiah”* to him being the *“Son”* of God – to claim the **very intimate nature of Their Relationship**.

Notice also, that the way Jesus indicated he was fulfilling **God's Purpose** through himself was different from the common understanding. For example, Jesus' use of the word "**glory**" throughout the report of the Gospel of John is very different in its meaning than that which the hearer or reader might typically understand as the definition of the term. Jesus prayed in front of his disciples, "**Father, the hour has come. Give glory to Your Son, so that the Son may give glory to You. ... I have shown Your glory on earth; I have finished the work You gave me to do.**"

Craig R. Koester explains in his commentary on today's Scripture, "**The gospel links glorification to the process that culminates in the crucifixion.**" He writes, "And this brings us back to John 17, where Jesus says that **he has glorified God on earth by finishing the works that God gave him to do.** The Greek word for '**finish**' is *teleioō*, the word Jesus will utter at the time of his death when he says *tetelestai*, '**it is finished.**'" Koester says, "If Jesus glorifies God on earth by accomplishing God's works, then" "**he glorifies God by the crucifixion that completes these works.**" "The question is how he does this."

Koester continues, "Put briefly, if the signs reveal God's glory by displaying divine power, the" "**crucifixion reveals God's glory by conveying divine love.**" Koester concludes his argument, "The crucifixion completes Jesus' work of glorifying God on earth, for by laying down his life "**he gives himself completely so that the world may know of Jesus' love for God and God's love for the world (John 3:16; 14:31).**" (workingpreacher.org, "Commentary on John 17:1-11" by Craig R. Koester)

Biblical scholars often attribute to another author the reference in John 1 of Jesus being "**the Word**" through Whom everything was created because, supposedly, such imagery is not found in the rest of the Gospel of John. However, Jesus went on to pray out loud, "**Father! Give me glory in Your presence now, the same glory I had with You before the world was made.**" It seems clear to me Jesus was making reference to his role in the Creation! **If God's Glory and Jesus' glory are the same – the Divine's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for humanity and Creation, then Jesus was declaring this Love of God is at the Heart of the Almighty – the Creator.**

Jesus continued to explain the nature of our relationship with God and himself as he prayed aloud, "**I have made You known to those You gave me out of the world. They belonged to You, and You gave them to me.**" Jesus then went on to illustrate how his purpose and our New Faith Relationship with him and the Divine Parent is tightly drawn up in his relationship with God. Jesus continued praying aloud, "**They have obeyed Your Word,**" [notice Jesus continued to use the "**Word**" imagery for himself] "**and now they know that everything You gave me comes from You. I gave them the message that You gave me, and they received it; they know that it is true that I came from You, and they believe that You sent me.**" Remember, knowing Jesus and the Divine Parent and Their Relationship is an essential part of having or living "**eternal life**"!

After revealing all of this to his disciples through his prayer spoken aloud, just prior to his being betrayed, taken prisoner, falsely charged, wrongly tried, tortured, executed on the cross, dead, and buried, Jesus pulls the **Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love of God, which he manifested, together with our New Faith Relationship with himself and the Divine Parent – "eternal life" through his loving petition for our welfare!** Jesus said aloud, "**I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those You gave me, for they belong to You. All I have is Yours, and all You have is mine; and my glory is shown through them. ... Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of Your Name, the name You gave me, so that they may be one just as You and I are one.**"

Jesus prayed for God to "**keep**" us "**safe by the power of**" God's "**Name**" – Jesus' "**name**", so that we live "**eternal life**" – live out our **New Faith Relationship with the Divine Parent and Jesus in unity with one another, as God and "the Son" "are one"**. Sisters and Brothers in Christ, you and I – all of us and all who belong to God and the Son are called to live out "**eternal life**" – "**know**" – relate with the **Divine Parent and Jesus Christ – manifest the same "glory" – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love which Jesus fulfilled.** We are to do that in the way we relate to God and Jesus, one another, and with all of humanity and Creation – with self-giving and sacrificial love! Amen.