



May 4, 2008

Focus scripture
John 17:1–11

Additional scriptures

Acts 1:6–14

Psalms 68: 1–10, 32–35

1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11

We pray, O God, out of the grace of Jesus' prayer for us.

We pray for faith, not for ourselves alone, but also for those whose faith might be stirred by ours. We pray for community with you and with all those for whom Christ prays in every time and place.
Amen.

Community of Prayer

Jesus offers a prayer that showers disciples – in that time and for all time – with vocation and unity in God through Christ. So prayed for, the community of Jesus becomes a community of prayer. Such prayer strengthens and empowers faithful witness and service. Such prayer holds up the vulnerable in word and for deed. Such prayer rejoices in God.

Focus Scripture: John 17:1–11

Jesus' farewell discourse in John 14–17 prepares the disciples for Jesus' departure. It closes with a prayer, the first half of which forms our focus scripture. This is sometimes called Jesus' "high priestly prayer." Like the high priest who prayed on behalf of Israel, Jesus prays for others on the eve of his death on the Passover. In John's gospel, Jesus dies when the Passover lamb was slain in the temple. The other gospels place the death a day later.

Jesus offers this prayer immediately before entering the Garden of Gethsemane. Unlike the other gospel accounts where Jesus' prayer in the garden struggles with his impending death, John's gospel describes Jesus as affirming the hour that has come as one of glorification. Jesus prays in the hearing of the disciples, for while the prayer is addressed to God, its concern is for the disciples.

The immediate focus of this prayer is the disciples of that time and those who will follow. The wider focus encompasses the world. Taken out of context, concern for the world in this prayer might appear to be cast in negative expressions (see especially verses 14–16). John 3:16–17 provides the balance. Jesus' coming has been generated by God's *love* for the world. The purpose of that love is the world's saving. Jesus prays for those called to embody that love in his absence. If God's love is to be seen in this world, it will be through their (our) witness.

"Glory" and "community" are key themes in Jesus' prayer. "Glory" in John has to do with the revealing of God. The cross and the Resurrection together form the "hour" when God is revealed through Jesus. "Community" is understood in several ways. Jesus prays for the immediate community of disciples who follow him. Jesus prays for the later community of

those who will believe through the witness of these first disciples. Jesus prays that these communities will in turn know the intimacy of relationship that Jesus enjoys with God. Community's hope is relational. Community's hope is also missional. "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21b).

Jesus' prayer intends to empower those who follow. Likewise, empowerment for witness is a backdrop in the other readings. **Acts 1:6–14** awaits the witness made possible by the coming of God's Spirit. The mention of Samaria and the ends of the earth hints this witness will go far beyond traditional borders and limits. **Psalms 68:1–10** witnesses with praise and awe to a God concerned for those who are vulnerable. **1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11** sees suffering as the context of the church's witness. That context is said to be shared with "brothers and sisters in all the world."

God's empowering Spirit is another common theme in these texts. Jesus' words in **Acts 1:7–8** steer disciples away from end-time speculations to preparation for God's presence in Spirit now. The psalmist praises God, who brings power and strength to God's people. The writer of 1 Peter celebrates the Spirit who rests upon us, and the God whose power is without end.

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To be a community of faith is to be a community of prayer. In what ways does your congregation function as a community of prayer? When have you prayed for, or been prayed for by another, in memorable ways? Where do you experience the connections between prayer and hope; prayer and witness; prayer and power?

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