

1 John 5:9-13; John 17:1-26

***Belonging*©
7th Sunday of Easter**

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When I was nine years old, my mother married my stepfather, Craig Buckner. The Buckner family owned a successful furniture store in Coffeyville (my home town) and people knew my family because of the store. Plus, the Buckner's had been lifetime members of the First Baptist Church and many people knew them through the church, which had large membership.

My mother was very active in a music club and was known in town for her singing and violin playing. My grandmother also was very musical and my grandfather was a respected chiropractor, known and loved by many.

When I was an older teenager, beginning to sow my oats (and I'm not talking about farming), my mother often would say to me as I was going out the door: "Remember who you are."

Or, when I was beginning to look for my first job, she would say, "tell them who you are." Meaning, of course, tell them who my family is; who I come from. That might be a shoe-in for being given a chance.

But, I resisted that. I didn't like the idea of needing to tell someone who my parents were so that I could get a job. I wanted to get that employment all on my own merit. I wasn't thinking very clearly, of course, because I really had no merit. I hadn't done anything to prove my worthiness or my capability.

I realize now that it's true what they say: You get your first job based on who you know. You keep your job based on who you are.

My mom was a very faithful Christian woman who prayed every day for her children – for our safety, for our faith, and for our honor. It was important to her that we live up to the family name; that we be respectful and bring pride and not shame to our family. If we did something we shouldn't be doing, it definitely would be seen, and it would bring embarrassment to the family we belonged to.

Likewise, if we acted in a way that was exemplary of how we were raised – to be respectful, honorable, responsible, and most importantly – young people who were Christian – that behavior shined a light on our family. It brought pride and joy. It revealed what our family values were to the community.

I began thinking about all this as I read and reread this prayer of Jesus for his followers – for those who belong to him. Jesus knows the hour of his death is right around the corner now. He has talked to his disciples at the table; he washed their feet, demonstrating what real Christ-like love looks like – a person who serve another.

He has assured his disciples that he will come back and that he is going to prepare a place for them to be when the time is right. He has promised the Holy Spirit to comfort them and to empower them.

But now, we have this great privilege of listening in on this very intimate prayer Jesus prays for his followers – not just what he tells them. This is a conversation; an intercessory prayer from the Son of God to God, his Father.

Jesus is talking about how he has almost completed the work he was sent to earth to do. He knows that he will be leaving the earth and will be leaving those he loves and he is beseeching the Father to take care of them – to protect them. They will still be in the world – a world that doesn't not know or care about Jesus. They will be in a world where they will be hated and misunderstood and persecuted.

Jesus says, "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world but to protect and guard them as they stay here after I leave." Jesus says he is not praying for the world but for those who belong to him..

That doesn't mean he doesn't care about the world. Of course he does. But in this prayer Jesus is concerned for his beloved, faithful ones. He is concerned that they will be alone and afraid.

Jesus talks numerous times in this prayer about glory and glorification. He asks the Father to bring him back to the place where he was before he came to earth – the place where he existed in glory before the world was created.

We remember the first chapter of John where he says "In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He says that the Word (meaning Jesus, God's Son, who reveals who God is) existed in glory before there was anything else.

And then Jesus talks about how his followers bring him glory. In one translation it says, in verse 10, ¹⁰ And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me with everything else of yours, and so *they are my glory!* Jesus says. (Living Bible Translation).

Other translations say, *they bring me glory, or my glory comes through them.*

But what does that really mean? What is glory? To glorify means to worship, to show adoration and praise. To magnify, to shine a light on so that we can see clearly.

The Message translates verse ten this way: *Everything mine is yours, and yours mine, And my life is on display in them.* (THE MESSAGE)

So what it seems Jesus is saying is that his work as the human Jesus is almost complete. He will be going back to his place of divinity. He will be taking his place at the right hand of Almighty God – the Father – the One who sent him to earth to be able to reveal himself to humankind.

But Jesus is praying for those who have come to believe the truth about him – that he is the Son of God. These are the ones John is talking about in our other reading from 1st John - *All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true ... He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

And Jesus says in this prayer that he is praying, not just for those who are his current followers, but for all who will come to believe in him and follow him in the future. And that, my friends, includes you and me.

This prayer is so wonderful, so intimate, so assuring to us that we who believe, who follow him, truly belong to Jesus. And in belonging to Jesus, we belong to God. And to be part of this family – this family of Jesus – is to belong with honor. It is to live a life that puts Jesus life, as The Message says, on display. Our lives shine a light on the face of the one we belong to.

I still like that saying – We get our job – or in this case, our salvation, our entry into the Christian family, by who we know, not by any special thing we are. And who we know is the Savior – Jesus. It is through him that we belong. It is because of what Jesus did in the gift of his life for our sakes that we have this welcome into the family of faith.

But it is in who we are – in how we live lives that reflect his teachings, his example, his love – that is the way we bring him – Jesus, glory. We glorify Jesus by our Christ-like living.

And so, in hearing this prayer – this High Priestly Prayer of Jesus praying to his Father God we hear the love that is between them. We hear the love Jesus has for all his followers – in the present and in the future.

We hear over and over that Greek word – Doxa – that is translated into English meaning Glory. And soon we will sing the Doxology – Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without end. Amen.

Glory belongs to Christ for what he has done for us in his death and resurrection. He gave his all that we would live forever in the presence of his glory.

He asks it all in the name of God, which isn't just to say his name but refers to the very character of God – full of grace and truth, full of love and joy. God is the source of everything Jesus has and that comes to us – the family of God as well.

We belong to the family. Jesus has claimed us as his own. He has given us the gift of eternal life in the gift of himself. Just as our mothers pray for their children, Jesus continues to pray for us.

Remember who you are. Remember whose you are – who you belong to. You come from a very good family indeed.