

¹After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples], he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

For some of us, we can't imagine that the day has come. For others among us, we thought this event surely must have already happened by now. A few weeks back, the band Aerosmith announced that later this year they will begin their Peace Out Tour, which will be their last. Forming in Boston over 50 years ago, Aerosmith has had more certified album sales than any other American group, and many critics herald them as the best band this country has ever produced. Disney World even has a roller coaster dedicated to them. One thing that is remarkable about Aerosmith is how consistent their membership has been over the decades. All five original members are still a part of

the group, and only for a few years in the late 70s and early 80s did two of them step away from the band. Drummer Joey Kramer, however, has said he won't be a part of this farewell tour, citing a need to focus on his health and his family at this time. All of the members are in their 70s now. Over 50 years making music together. In their announcement of this tour, the band said, "It's not goodbye... it's PEACE OUT!"

I appreciate that nuanced statement. "It's not goodbye... it's peace out." Whether it is fans, or friends, or family, saying goodbye can be hard to do, especially because finality seems to be interlaced with the word "goodbye." This time of year is sprinkled with all types of graduations, and assuming you've experienced one, you know how the occasion contains not only felicitations upon the accomplishment, but a graduation also contains a spoken hope for a reunion of some sort with others at some indefinite point in the future. So, until that reunion happens, "peace out."

Today marks the final Sunday of the season of Easter. Scripture tells us that Jesus ascended to heaven forty days after his resurrection, and the arrival of the Holy Spirit came on the fifty day mark. According to the church calendar, this past Thursday was the commemoration of his ascension, and next Sunday is the day of Pentecost. If my math is right, for these ten days every year the Church joins the first Christians in the experience of collectively... [looks around and shrugs shoulders]. "Now what?" "Who's in charge here?" It is that subtle experience of inactivity unease. "Should we be doing something?" I for one am glad that God gives the Church ten days every year to ruminate on that feeling, because sometimes it is hard to simply rest.

"Just... rest" seems to be the answer. "Take a break from all the doing. Take ten days to just... hang out... wait. Just... rest, and trust that things will be covered."

Our gospel lesson takes place before Jesus' ascension. It takes place at the end of what is called Jesus' farewell discourse during his final meal with his disciples before his arrest. In John, this discourse at the last supper stretches over several chapters. During this discourse he helps them understand what is to come over the next day, and he opens up about his relationship with the Father. He displays his love for the disciples through washing their feet, and then he tells them that love shall be the governing ethic for this community. He has also told the disciples that he is leaving them to return to his father. Our lesson marks a shift in the farewell discourse, because Jesus is no

longer speaking to the disciples. Now he is praying to God, and the disciples – and us – are permitted to hear his prayer.

In this prayer, Jesus sounds confident that God will see him through this hour, which is a term with special meaning used multiple times in John's gospel. His death, resurrection, and ascension are — though three specific events — understood as one single, cataclysmic event for both heaven and earth: “my hour” as Jesus puts it. All of existence and all of time — and beyond! — find their meaning and culmination in his hour. As Jesus begins this prayer, he states that his hour reveals glory, though it is hard to peg down only one definition of this glory. Likewise, according to this prayer this hour reveals giving; the Father gave the Christians to Jesus, who was given to the world and to Christians. All of it was given life through Jesus, and Jesus is giving it to the Father, who also created it. Jesus as the Word gave the followers God's word, who gave that word with the world, and the word will in turn be given to God. That's the simplified version of it. The point is it is next to impossible to diagram how all of that giving works, and the incoherence might be the point. Because when it comes to the topics of Christ's glory and all the interwoven giving that reaches its culmination in Christ's hour, Jesus knows it is incomprehensible. He probably wants us to have that sense of awe. Because when all of time, all of the cosmos, and all of the heavenly realms converge on his hour, the only thing we can do is gaze upon it in awe.

One thing we teach our affirmation students is that the phrase “You are to fear God” is better translated as “You are to be in awe of God.” We should never associate God with the likes of an abuser who attempts to control others through fear. The phrase “you are to fear God” means that we are to marvel at and stand in wonder of God, which inevitably leads to some shaking in our boots, but scripture also tells us this awe of God compels us to give praise.

Jesus doesn't want to leave the disciples – or us – with a sense of bewilderment while also feeling abandoned by his departure. So in verse 11 he finally reaches the portion of the prayer where he asks for something: Jesus asks the Holy Father to protect the ones who listen to his words so that they may be one. What Jesus is doing is handing us back to the care of God. Not only does he hand us back, but we hear Jesus holding God accountable. God has made promises to us – to welcome,

accept, and cherish – and Jesus is reminding God of that. The reason why Jesus hands us back to God's care before he departs is because Jesus loves us. He wants us to know we are not abandoned.

As the first disciples observed Jesus ascend to heaven, they could have felt abandoned. They could have had a sense of inactivity unease. “What do we do now?” “Who is going to call the shots?” “What is next?” They were experiencing inactivity unease. They were asking questions that, quite frankly, we still ask on this side of Pentecost. But in that hour of Jesus' ascension, I hope those disciples remembered this prayer in the farewell discourse. They would remember that they are handed back into God's care. They could trust that God is going to act and to lead; they don't have to do this on their own. They – and we – are assured that Christian life together rests in and depends on God's care. Jesus' prayer holds God to account for our protection, yet this prayer also is a message for the first disciples and for us today that seeks to calm any unease. This prayer offers assurances that we are in God's care, and until Jesus reunites with us at a later time, God has things under control. It is not goodbye, it is peace out.

Amen.