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## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2020

### Hebrews 13:5-16 & John 17:1-13

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The two comparisons the Bible makes in religion about heaven and earth are the words “kingdom” and “family”. Although Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God, He preferred comparing it to family life. God is Father. Christ is Son. All of God's people are joint heirs with Christ and brothers and sisters with one another.

What do the words Yahweh, Allah, Jehovah, and Elohim, have in common? They are names for God from various religious traditions. These are only a few names for God. Islam has 99 names for God, and Zoroastrianism has 101. Some religions have had names for God that were so holy they were never actually spoken. As people of faith today, is there another name that we might use for God? Did you notice the first words of Jesus's prayer?

Our Gospel reading is part of a prayer Jesus prayed on the night before His death. It has been often called His "high priestly prayer," which is the most solemn and tender words ever spoken. According to John's Gospel, Jesus began His prayer like this: "When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted His eyes to heaven and said, 'Father.'" Here we see Him addressing God as Father, pledging himself to God's work as a dutiful Son, and widening the family circle of faith to include all those who love and serve God. (John 17:1-11)

Can you imagine a more straightforward beginning to a prayer? It is a personal exchange between Father and Son. With that first word of the prayer: "Father." Jesus' hope and confidence in earth and heaven was expressed with the word, "Father." He trusted totally in God. Remember His teaching about anxiety. People then, like people today, worried about the necessities of life. Many of them were desperately poor and had families to feed. He pointed to the birds of the air and the beauty of the wildflowers, assuring them that God cares for all creation, including them. One day he saw a wheat field with patches of weeds running through it. He used it to talk about the mystery of good and evil. If God is our loving Creator, how can there be so much evil in the world? Jesus said an enemy had planted the weeds. They could not be rooted out now, or the wheat would also be lost. But at harvest, the grain would be separated from the weeds.

Jesus had a tremendous amount of patience! We must remember that Jesus lived in the same world we do. Jesus saw the natural disasters of floods and earthquakes. Some evil people killed innocent victims without remorse. But it did not plunge Him into despair. He saw the same world as ours with different eyes. We often see the world as cold, dark, and empty. Jesus saw it as His Father's world. God had created it, was still working on it, and would someday bring it to completion. Jesus trusted God.

He prayed to protect his disciples from the evil one, *the spirit of the world*. This spirit is the lack of morality made up of evil thoughts, desires, and actions of men and women inspired and controlled by Satan. Christ called Satan the prince of the world. Against this monstrous enemy, his unsteady disciples would need strong protection.

Jesus did not become impatient when all of God's purposes did not come to pass in a few years. The creed we often recite begins, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." It is the truth. But we need to be careful with the word "Almighty." Improperly understood, it could damage our faith. When we speak of God

the Father Almighty, what do we mean? It becomes problematic if we say God can do anything, at any time, and in any way. He can but He will not. Why doesn't God stop all wars everywhere? Or make all sick people well? Or feed all the starving children? Why doesn't God put an end to injustice? A part of the answer comes from the word, "Father."

God is not an almighty dictator or tyrant. He is the almighty Father. No responsible parents are all-powerful in the sense that they can do anything they want, at any time and in any way. Loving parents are limited by their parenthood. One restriction is the parent's love. The other is the child's limitations. A physically strong father, for example, can intimidate his children, but a loving father will not do this. A mother has ideals she hopes to instill in her children, but a loving mother will recognize that it is not time to deal with this issue. She will have to wait until small minds have reached an appropriate level of maturity.

Therefore, God does not solve all our problems for us as soon as we pray. God is waiting for our minds to expand and grow, patiently waiting for us to mature, waiting for the fullness of time. Why was the cross raised at Golgotha on which Jesus died? Because God rejected using force and chose another option. God would persuade us with love. As time rolls onward from century to century, God struggles with humanity's stubborn hearts and patiently waits for their cooperation of stubborn wills.

In troubled times like these with the pandemic, the violent storms, the depressed economy, and the huge loss of employment, we need the parental support that sustained Jesus through His trying times. We need our community of faith that welcomes us as beloved sisters and brothers. We need that "family" experience of faith this day and always.

Finally, Christ prayed for all who, in the future, would believe in him. He prayed that men and women of every race and color would form a unity of faith, a unity of worship, a unity of love. His disciples believed in Him and followed Him, and He taught them the knowledge of the Father and the way of grace and eternal life. He pledged to send them the Holy Spirit, who would abide in them to continue the great work of redemption, and He promised to be with them until the end of time.

The ancients thought of God as a natural force, like the sun, or an animal spirit, like a bear. More developed cultures pictured God in human terms, like a warrior or a king. Only in biblical religion did an entirely personal understanding of God emerge. Only there do we learn of God as our Father and our Friend.

Amen!