

What we encounter today in John 17 is a prayer and it is worth paying attention to. Why? Because it was Jesus who offered the prayer and because of what Jesus prayed. You see, the disciples had been on quite a journey with Jesus as their ultimate example and leader and teacher. During Jesus' three years of ministry, spreading the good news of God's love and healing and performing miracles, the disciples had grown weary and tired along the way. Jesus, through his presence and faithful example of discipleship to God, gave them hope and strength that kept them forging ahead. Toward the end of Jesus' life, when Jesus knew the time had come for him to return and go be at the right hand of God, Jesus needed a way to ensure his followers that they would not be left alone. Jesus wanted the disciples to keep moving ahead doing what God had created and was calling them to do. But what could Jesus do to assure them? Just a few chapters earlier in John 14, in the same passage that Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus also assures the disciples that an advocate, the Holy Spirit, was coming to be with them. The Holy Spirit would be for the disciples the divine presence and power they longed for in Jesus' absence and the Holy Spirit would be able to be with them wherever they went. And what else does Jesus do assure them? Jesus does what is perhaps one of things Jesus does best. Jesus prays! He prays to God on behalf of the disciples and all those whom he has met and ministered to.

What exactly is Jesus praying for in John 17?

Jesus prays to God: I love you God. I appreciate you God. Thank you, God, for glorifying yourself through me. You have made me who I am, and I am honored to live and serve in honor of you. I am honored to love these, your people, just as you love me. I have been there for them and showed them what you have asked me to show them. I have told them what you have asked me to tell them. I have given them all you have asked me to give them. Just as you love me, I have loved them God, all of them. Because I have loved them and they have witnessed you through me, I believe they will continue on in the world even when I return to you. As they continue on in the world when I return, I pray you, God, will guard them and protect them as they pursue life. May they know life is a gift from you. May they have one heart and one mind, just as you and I have one heart and one mind.

I think it is so cool and awesome that Jesus prays this prayer for the disciples. And it really isn't just for the disciples in that time and place. Jesus' prayer here is a prayer for all God's children for generation to generation, for you and for me. And what a prayer! For Jesus to pray like this is the true representation of his love for us. It reveals his desires for us and his hopes for us and

his longing for us to be blessed by God the same way in which he was blessed by God. Jesus' prayer is a revelation of not only what Jesus says, but more important, what Jesus has embodied and done for us. This makes Jesus' prayer here a living prayer.

There is a term for prayers like this and that is "living prayer." It means the prayer is alive and moving and active in time. And since prayer is communication with God, it means to actively, with every movement and action in life, be in communication with God. To consider this is also to consider Jesus' entire life as one long "living prayer."

Guess what? We too are called to live our life as one continuous "living prayer", actively in communication with God, with every movement and action in life. Prayer is not just words, it is action. Raphael Warnock, during a speech on Capital Hill, in response to an Atlanta shooting in which his kids were on lockdown, said poignantly "prayer needs legs, our legs. To just tell someone that you are thinking about them and praying for them without the willingness to do anything about it is making mockery of prayer." In John 17, Jesus wasn't just offering thoughts and prayers, Jesus was praying an offering of his life exemplified in his presence, teaching, giving, sacrificing, loving. My prayer is that we too will be a living prayer each day, embodying the glory of God shining through us in the power and name of Jesus Christ.

With my sabbatical leave beginning tomorrow, I couldn't help but think about this living prayer from Jesus and how it might correlate. It fits quite well I think for us all. You as you continue in the ministries of worship, prayer, singing, Vacation Bible School, mission to Malawi, and all the other things summer gifts you the opportunity to explore and discover of God's glory, and me as I seek rest, restoration, and renewal.

The phrase that came to mind for me was "just keep swimming." And I think it came to mind for me because it is far more than words. "Just keep swimming" is a mantra, and I would even say a mantra of faith, like a living prayer.

"Just Keep Swimming" comes from the movies *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*. It is Dory's mantra for "never give up, keep going, just keep swimming." "Just keep swimming, just keep swimming, what do we do, we just keep swimming." We might liken it to Bob's mantra "baby steps" in *What about Bob?*: just take one step at a time, put one foot in front of the other. We can also liken it to "do the next right thing" in the movie *Frozen 2*: when the wise troll tells Elsa and Anna, "When the future is unknown, the only thing to do is "do the next right thing."

"Just keep swimming" headlines the narrative of *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory* in three main scenes.

The first is when Dory and Marlin are crossing the deep blue in search of Nemo, Marlin's son, who was taken off the reef by divers. Each scene presents another challenge, each one seemingly bigger than the next. The expanse of the ocean is so big and so deep the only thing to do was "just keep swimming." By doing so, Dory and Marlin found themselves able to overcome insurmountable odds and reach their desired destination.

The second was when Marlin and Nemo are reunited at the end of the movie. While they are swimming back out to sea to return home, they pass Dory who has gotten caught in a fishing net with a school of groupers. Nemo had learned a thing or two in his time away from his dad and teamwork was perhaps the most important of them. On cue, Nemo convinces his very nervous dad Marlin, who didn't want to lose his son again, that he knew how to set Dory free. To do so, it would mean separating and spreading out to tell every fish they had to swim down in the same direction. Nemo swims into the middle of the grouper and gets to Dory and they both begin to tell all the other fish to swim down. Marlin is telling the fish all around the net to do as Nemo said. Every fish had a role and every fish followed through swimming down together. While doing so, Dory is heard singing "just keep swimming, just keep swimming, what do we do, we just keep swimming." The net returned to the bottom of the ocean floor and all the fish were able to escape the fishing net. Marlin, Dory, and Nemo were together again and able to return home.

The third time "Just keep swimming" headlines is actually the origin of where Dory learned it. She had learned it from her mom and dad at an early age because she had a hard time remembering her way home. Her mom and dad set out a path of shells to help guide Dory and told her, "When you are lost, don't just freeze and hide, instead, just keep swimming." Eventually, as Dory did just that, "just kept swimming," she found her way home again and reunited with her parents.

In the minutes, hours, days, and weeks ahead, I actively pray we will all "Just keep swimming": just keep moving toward Christ's will and way, just keep celebrating God's grace, just keep inspiring the next generation for Christ, just keep singing, just keep listening to God, just keep worshipping, just keep growing, just keep loving, just keep serving, just keep praying (with legs).

Like groupers caught in the net of life, we must come together in unity and be dedicated to moving in the same direction. Doing this will continue to move the needle of grace and love in the world and liberate us all to glory. "Just keep swimming, just keep swimming, what do we do, just keep swimming."

Let us pray:

Good morning again God, what a glorious day and a what an incredible time of worship and praise. We love you God. We appreciate you God. We thank you for shining your divine light upon and within us all God. We are honored and humbled to be your children in this time and this place. We are so grateful to you God for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, and the example he set before us. His life has been a gift to us all to show us the way, the truth, and the life. His teachings have been a gift to us all to guide us and direct us toward your will. His sacrifices continue to be a gift of hope and peace we can't find in anything or anyone else.

As we continue on in the gift of life only you can give us, we long for your presence and protection. We pray, with legs of willingness and ambition, with hearts of humility and desire, to be of one heart and one mind, just as you, God, are of one heart and one mind with Christ.

As we journey through this gift of life only you can give us, sometimes with nothing but the deep blue open before us, the unknowns of the future glaring at us, may we courageously take one step at a time, do the next right thing, and just keep swimming, in trust that you are with us and will never leave us or forsake us.

As challenges arise and we fall captive to the nets of this world, crammed in space and the loss of hope billowing out, may we come together in purpose with others close to us, others you have placed in our lives, and trust our collective efforts to be enough, that when we all focus on the same goals and move in the same direction, we will overcome challenges and hardships and break the chains of captivity.

For those times we are lost and only want to freeze and hide and remove ourselves from others, times we are overwhelmed with fear or frustration, times we just don't see a way home, may we remember that you are always with us, that you have marked the way home for us all in Christ Jesus.

We actively, with every movement and action in life, pray all this in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Lord and Savior, who taught his disciples of every time and place to pray together...

Our Father...