

Easter 7 – May 21, 2023

Text: John 17:1-11

Theme: What is your purpose?

**What is your purpose in this life? That is a question you really have to answer, or you will bounce around life here to there and never really feel as though you have accomplished much. And if you come up with the wrong purpose, you will be left feeling empty and unfulfilled. Men who retire, for whom making money or doing their job was their sole purpose in life, don't know what to do with themselves. They enjoy sleeping in and playing golf or fishing whenever they like for a while but pretty soon that becomes dull. Women who think that rearing their children was their sole purpose feel distraught when the children leave home and cease to need their daily help and consolation. Athletes who think that their sport is their sole purpose find out very quickly how fickle the human body can be and when they can no longer play, they often cast about searching for something else but if all they have done is pursue their sport, they don't know how to do anything else. If you focus on the wrong purpose, you're going to be sad and unfulfilled. So how do you find the right purpose?**

**Churches fail at this as often as individuals. If churches pursue being the best show in town, whether that means drums and guitars or pipe organs and grand pianos, they soon learn what every Broadway actor already knows. All shows, even the best**

**ones, eventually close. If they place all their emphasis on meeting societal needs like poverty, hunger, injustice and homelessness, they become overwhelmed by the staggering quantity of demands and the futility of trying to help people but never knowing if you are really helping or if you are creating dependence and thereby hurting people by teaching them that they are not capable of surviving without someone else to pave their way. If their sole focus is on being doctrinally pure and liturgically correct, they face the reality of ministering in a broken, sinful world where nothing is black and white and more and more people do not recognize the Church as the authority in their lives. At best, the Church is AN authority but not THE authority. I just recently heard someone say, "well the Bible has been interpreted by human beings so who knows whether it is accurate." That is the mantra of many in Generations Y and Z. The "self" is their idol and authority, and no one and nothing is higher than their false god, which is themselves.**

**Whether we're talking about a church or an individual, you have to have the right purpose or you will be facing difficulty and futility. Thankfully, Jesus tells us our purpose in our Gospel for today. It is called His High Priestly Prayer and he prays it immediately before His arrest in the Garden after which He will be tried, convicted and crucified for our sins. What we are witnessing**

**in the Gospel reading is a condemned man tying up all the loose ends before the last days of His life on earth. He left behind for us a transcription of His prayer to help us who follow Him in this world. So, we don't have to cast about guessing at what we ought to do next. Jesus clearly tells us what our purpose is.**

**"For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."**

**Jesus prays for us. He does not pray for the world. Now we know that He loves the world so He's not saying that He doesn't care about the world, but He is saying that this does not apply to the world. He's praying for us because we are the part of Him that is left in the world after He has ascended into Heaven. We have a purpose here. We are His purpose here because it is we who He has left behind to witness about Him to the unbelieving and faithless world. Our purpose is to glorify Jesus in everything we say and**

**everything we do. That is our only purpose and if we get that right, everything else will fall into line.**

**If we work a job our whole lives and the time has come for us to retire, but our purpose in life has not been to do a job but to glorify Jesus, retirement is exciting! Now we get to glorify Jesus without the concerns of making money to live. If we have reared our children, but our purpose has been to glorify Jesus, we will be excited when they leave the nest to glorify Jesus in new and different ways. We accomplished our purpose by being the first and most important evangelist as a parent. If we are an athlete but our purpose is not to pursue sport but to glorify Jesus, we will revel every time we get to tell the people who watch us perform that it is Jesus who we serve and glorify with our abilities.**

**Likewise, if we are a church that is committed to glorifying Jesus, how many people attend anything is immaterial because we will rejoice in knowing that God has led people to us to allow us to witness His glory to them. It does not matter if singers sing off-key or preachers are long-winded or candles fail to light. We are here to do our part to glorify Jesus and He will make all the parts fit so that our goal is accomplished. We never know what the Holy Spirit is doing. But we know He is working through all of us imperfect**

**vessels and as long as we understand our purpose, we will rejoice at having been the vessels of the Holy Spirit.**

**Here at Trinity specifically, our goal is not to be a religious club that serves its members. Our goal is to work together to witness the glory of God to everyone in our community. God will lay people in our path for the time He determines and then He will move those people elsewhere in His kingdom to do work for Him that He has prepared for them to do. We are one cog in God's great wheel, and we do our part to glorify Him in all that we do, teach and confess. We strive to build the kingdom and send people out into the world to take what they have seen here and proclaim it elsewhere. This is our purpose: not to be a big club, not to be political force, not to be social support agency. Our purpose is to glorify God by empowering others to glorify God and we can do that because Jesus is praying for us.**

**That is where we receive our strength, our ability to do what is asked of us. Jesus is praying for us. The second person of the Holy Trinity has laid this mission upon us and now He prays for us. Of course we will succeed. How could we do anything else?**