

I assume that none of you are experts at predicting the future. If you were you'd be able to know what tomorrow's lottery numbers are and you'd never worry about money again! No one is an expert on the future, though many people try. You have the obvious ones like those who try to predict the end of the world. (They never seem to get the Bible where it says in Luke 21:8, "...many will come and say, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them." In other words, if someone tries to say they know the end of the world they are automatically wrong!) But of course there are plenty of other predictions about the future too. I can't count the number of 'experts' who have tried to predict what will happen in Libya. Politicians on the campaign trail often predict the dire consequences that would happen if their opponent was elected. How many people can accurately predict the top or bottom of a stock market cycle? I like the saying, "He's a good economist. He predicted nine out of the last three recessions."

Of course having a prediction of the future is a great help. If my garden is dry and needs to be watered I'll check the weather forecast. If rain is predicted I'm not going to bother watering it. People along the Mississippi can anticipate the river's peak long before it happens and so they can prepare and

hopefully minimize damage.

We like to know what's coming. That way we can be prepared. And when we can foresee several possibilities we may prepare for them all. It is when we have no idea what to expect that we may get scared. Or perhaps when everything we can foresee looks horrible we really start to worry.

That's probably a good entry point for our gospel reading for today. We read the beginning part of a prayer that Jesus gives at the end of the Last Supper with his disciples. In a few hours he will be captured, arrested, crucified and dead. He knew that. His disciples did not.

Now this prayer is hard to understand. I doubt it made sense to you when it was read. If it did then you probably weren't paying attention. I originally planned to have today's sermon be a verse by verse study of it, but I could predict your eyes glazing over even more quickly than they usually do during a sermon. So I abandoned the idea. Instead lets look at two main themes in these verses. Both of them have to do with the future.

First is this bit about glory. Is God some ego maniac that Jesus prays in verse 1, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you..." And also in verse 4, "I

glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had in your presence before the world began." With all this glory flowing around you'd get the idea that Jesus and the Father are in some sort of a mutual admiration society. But that is not the case.

It is important to remember in John's gospel that to give glory to God is to reveal God's nature. You could safely replace the word "glory" with the word "reveal" in these verses. Verse 1 would then go, "Father, the hour has come; reveal your Son so that the Son may reveal you,..." It is still a bit circular, but I think we can see Jesus' point more clearly than the literal translation.

So, to glorify God is to reveal God. Glorifying God is not coming to sing praises to God, or groveling before him saying, "You're so great and I'm not worthy." No, glorifying God is revealing the nature of God through your own life - what you do and what you say. Jesus then is the ultimate one to glorify God. Jesus reveals God most fully. His task on earth was to show us all what God is like. He did it by preaching and teaching and performing miracles. And his ultimate revelation was of course the crucifixion. The crucifixion most fully reveals God's true nature to us. John's gospel sees the cross as glorious because

it reveals the depth of God's love - a true and abiding self-sacrificing love.

The prayer appears to be so repetitive about revealing God because Jesus is being emphatic. It is the key and core of who he is. He wants there to be no doubt about what he does and why he does it. He also knows that his disciples are going to have a pretty tough time ahead.

If you'd have asked any socio-religious expert of the day to predict what the chances were of these 12 disciples actually getting a new religion going they would say almost zero. The tasks before them were so insurmountable and they were so ill equipped. They had no organizational structure. They had no money. And they lacked the education and political clout necessary to get something started. Best predictions would be they'd fizzle out in a few years; maybe they'd make a couple decades at best.

And so Jesus prays for his disciples. In verse 11 of our gospel reading he asks for their protection and their unity. Let's not overlook the importance of this. It was typical in those days for pagans to pray to their gods and offer sacrifices so they gods would do them favors and protect them. But that was people making requests of their gods. The idea of God naturally

looking out for His own people was completely foreign. And yet that is what we have in Jesus as he reveals to us God's nature. God is for us. God is even praying to himself for us! I know that sounds strange, but it is true. God doesn't want to see you fail. God wants to see you succeed at his work!

Jesus knew his disciples had a tough road ahead. And they were soon going to find that out too. Up to this point they depended on Jesus for leadership and everything else. But he'd soon be gone. He needed to go for the disciples to ever mature and deepen in faith. But still, that was going to be hard. The future looked so black and impossible.

But here is the other part of this prayer I wanted to bring up. The future may not be predictable, but it is in God's hands. Glance through the prayer again.

Who sent the Son? God did.

Who gave Jesus the disciples? God did.

Who taught the disciples about God's nature? God did.

Who supported the disciples during Jesus earthly ministry? God did.

Who sent them out? God did.

Who is guaranteeing the future? God is.

The future is impossible to predict, and that can be scary.

But remember that God is there. If I dare to summarize Jesus prayer it comes to something like this. When you doubt, fear, and struggle put the future in God's hands. You are God's. You are loved by god. God provides good things. And God has not abandoned you. The future does not ultimately depend on you. It does not depend on your intelligence, your strength, or your work. It depends on God.

So, let go of the future. Don't hold on to it, and don't worry when there seems to be no hope. The more you hold on the more frustrated you'll get. And the more you insist on being in control the harder it will be. Instead let the future be fully open to God's possibilities. For God has things in mind that we cannot even imagine; things like resurrection three days after crucifixion. And God's things are good. God who gave himself for you is hardly going to let you down.

Live each day in anticipation of God's possibilities. For God is still hard at work in this creation. He is guiding and drawing it to its ultimate future when all things will be known and no fears will find a place. Rejoice now in God's guaranteed good future. Amen