

Weekend of Sunday, May 16, 2021

7th Sunday of Easter /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B

First Reading: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Second Reading: 1 John 5:9-13

Gospel Reading: John 17:6-19

Sermon Title: “Jesus’ Prayer For The Church”

Theme

In this reading the church hears Jesus’ words on the night before his death—his prayer for his disciples and for all who would believe in him through their words.

Text

[Jesus prayed:] 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. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Sermon

The last couple of weeks our gospel readings have been from that portion of John's gospel known as the *Farewell Discourse*. It is known by that name because the context is from the evening of Jesus' betrayal, the night of the Last Supper, the evening we celebrate as Holy Thursday.

This particular passage is part of a prayer that is known as Jesus' *High Priestly Prayer*. It begins with verse 1 of chapter 17 and runs the entire chapter to verse 26, and in it, Jesus prayed for himself, his disciples, and those disciples of future generations who will be left to continue his mission. And then, after the prayer, John wrote that Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, and while there, he was betrayed and that started the chain of events that changed the world.

Thank God, God will never ask me to suffer as he did his own Son, but as I ponder the Passion, I can't help but think I would have been overwhelmed by my own involvement:

- How much this is going to hurt?
- How much humiliation I am going to have to endure?
- I wonder if I will be able to remain obedient and keep my mouth shut rather than to defend myself against the slanderous accusations that will be hurled against me?
- If like Jesus, I had the power of God at my disposal, will I be able to put down my own desire to enact a little justice?

These are the things that would have been on my mind. Maybe you can relate. But, the unique thing about this passage is, no matter what we think Jesus should be thinking about from our human perspective, we know what truly was on his mind because he prayed this prayer out loud and John, who was there, recorded it for future generations to know.

As I studied this text this week, it seems to me that Jesus wanted his disciples to know three concerns before he left them:

- 1) That he made his Father's name known.
- 2) That he prayed for their protection and sanctification.
- 3) That he desires that his disciples know the joy that he is experiencing in the completion of his mission on earth.

Firstly, Jesus prayed that he has made his Father's name known. The questions you ought to be asking are these: "What does that mean? Didn't the Jews know God's name?"

Jesus' mission was to make God's *name* known. But the Greek word that has been translated for us as *name* (ὄνομα, *onoma*) does not refer to God's name at all.

(ὄνομα, *onoma*) ~ name ~ the character and identity of God

Most Jews knew the several names by which God had been referred to in Hebrew scripture (Elohim, El Shaddai, Adonai, Jehovah, Yahweh, I AM, to name just a few). But the word Jesus used, *onoma*, means more broadly, the character and identity of God. When Jesus said that he made God's character and identity known, he meant that by his own life and example he gave God a human face; he was God incarnate; God in human form. If you want to know what God looks like, you need only to look at Jesus, and just to be clear I am not talking about physical features of Jesus exclusively, but rather the character of God revealed in the character of Jesus.

Onoma, the identity and character of God, also includes this concept that Jesus mentioned as God's "word(s)" and "truth" By this Jesus meant that in his revelation of God through his own life and example, he has transmitted the very essence of God, including God's love, grace, and mercy and God's love for justice, righteousness, and obedience. In the totality of Jesus' life, he has revealed the totality of God. Of all that could have been on his mind this evening, Jesus wanted his disciples to know this – that through his own life and ministry he had revealed God the Father to them.

- 2) Jesus prayed for the protection and sanctification of his disciples.

Secondly, Jesus prayed for the protection and sanctification of his disciples. Jesus knew the fate that awaited him in just a matter of minutes - hours at the most. He also knew and has said here and in other places that faith in himself will result in

trouble for those who pick up their crosses and follow him. A point of fact: most of those disciples in the room who heard Jesus pray this prayer ended up being martyred for their faith. This kind of violent end because of faith in him for his disciples, was on Jesus' mind.

But he wasn't simply praying for their protection, for there is something far worse than dying for one's faith in Christ. And that would be to deny one's faith in Christ due to persecution. In this passage, Jesus acknowledged that evil exists in the world and that faith in him will bring it on. He prayed that if and when his disciples are challenged they will be able to stand up to the test.

Sanctification – the process of being made holy

Now, *sanctification* is *not* a word we commonly use in the Lutheran tradition or our culture, but it means the *process of being made holy*. In the same way, that faith is a journey, sanctification or holiness is a process. Neither will be complete nor perfect for us this side of eternity.

The same is apparently true even for Jesus. He and his mission will become *sanctified* in its completion. And the same will be true for us. We will become sanctified as we fulfill our mission knowing full well that we will never accomplish sanctification this side of eternity.

Thirdly, when Jesus spoke of his sanctification, he did not speak simply of setting himself apart for his own death. But Jesus went well beyond the absurd when in this passage he said that he joyously embraced the completion of his revelation of God in the events of his Passion. That's right, he looked forward to his Passion, even while knowing that he would face humiliation, torture, and ultimately his death. And he did it *with joy*. (read the following joyfully)

¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

I don't think we ever hear this text read with joy. I don't think we ever think about the Last Supper as being a joyous occasion but I think there is room to understand it that way in John's telling of the story.

Allow me to offer an illustration that will probably be pretty effective at least for the mothers among us. When it comes to childbirth, I've only observed it twice, so I do not know anything about the pain involved. Most of you mothers chose to give birth to your children. But I can't imagine what it must be like to carry a pregnancy full term all the while thinking about the pain of childbirth that awaits you. But it is the joy that awaits you on the other side that makes it all worthwhile. The pain of childbirth is what you have to go through to experience the joy of motherhood and it seems that it has all been worth it.

In this prayer, Jesus both looked back on what he had accomplished and forward to what he had yet to do through the community of faith. Jesus' entire mission, his completion of the work of God through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, enables the sanctification of the community of faith (that's us) because it is in Jesus' entire mission, including his Passion, that the full truth of God is revealed – and this brought joy to Jesus. In the end, Jesus has said, it was worth it. You are worth it. We are worth it.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

This week as we ponder this text some more, I would like you to ponder that kind of love that Jesus had, and continues to have for you and me and all of creation. For the addict and the professional, for the prostitute and the teacher, for the young and the old, for the unemployed and work-a-holic. God in Christ loves them all.

Here comes another one of my axioms about ministry. If it matters to God, then it ought to matter to us. So the next time you see someone who is not like you, doesn't share your same values, remember, they too are loved by God. They belong here. We belong together.

Prayer

Loving God, the depth of your love for us is simply beyond our ability to understand. All we ask is that you give us the grace to accept it in faith and inspire us by your Spirit to speak of it to others through the living of our lives. And then Lord, when you see fit, take us to yourself so that we may experience the joy of perfect communion with you and our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen