

Jesus prays and so can we!
John 17:1-11

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Thursday was Ascension day, did any of you celebrate? That day probably went by and you didn't even give it one consideration that on that day, 40 days after Easter, Jesus walked outside Jerusalem with his disciples to the Mount of Olives and ascended into heaven. Our first reading recounted that story, and yet if I didn't point it out to you, how many of you would have even given Thursday another thought? Probably not many. Most of us can remember that Pentecost is coming up. 50 days after Easter, the church celebrates Pentecost as the day we wear red, remember our baptisms, have confirmations, and retell the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church. But that's next week.

Today we are at the 7th week of Easter. The Sunday that falls between the Ascension day rising of Christ into Heaven and the Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit roars down from heaven into and around the early faithful disciples. This Sunday to me always seemed odd because it fell between those two dates in the church calendar almost like an after thought. "Oops Ascension day came on Thursday and we can't celebrate Pentecost until the next week, so lets put another week of Easter in at the seventh week". It's almost an afterthought between two festival days of the church calendar.

Yet even with it jammed between two important days, the gospel message today takes us back to Holy Week, to Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. In John's Gospel, Jesus prays for God's Glory, for the disciples and for all who follow after.

I guess there is some logic to that selection for this week. Since on Ascension day, Jesus has departed from the disciples and from his followers. He is not precisely connected to them and us as he once was – when he walked with them and preached and healed and ate meals with them. No this is that time between – Jesus' incarnation on earth as a human and the return of God in the form of the Holy Spirit, the advocate who surrounds us and is constantly with us. And so we get part of Christ's prayer as our scripture reading.

This prayer from John chapter 17, usually called the High Priestly prayer, is broken up into three parts. Verses 1-5 show us Jesus praying for the glory of God, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." This prayer section is centered on the glory of God through the glorification of what is about to happen to the Son in his death and resurrection.

The second part of the prayer is for his followers. In verse 6-19, part of which we get today, Jesus prays that they (the disciples) may have his protection and wisdom, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” This prayer is about his disciples receiving the ability to continue on when he departs from them.

And finally the section not in our reading but follows right after this in scripture – is John 17:20-26 where Jesus prays for us. He prays “on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one...so that the world may believe.” This last section is about all who will follow what those first disciples teach, those who listened to Peter and Paul, to John and James. The new followers who became the church and continued to teach the next generation and so on and so on all the way to our generation.

So in these three parts Jesus has shown us that prayer goes beyond just our own immediate needs, instead prayer continues on to those we know and those we have yet to meet. Jesus in this model prayer has given us a great gift. A gift of prayer for the church, and I don't mean just St. Mark, but instead the universal church body.

When Jesus is praying for those who are with him and all those who will follow in that word, he is not praying for a particular congregation, or for a particular building or committee or council. Instead Jesus is praying for the people, the ones who gather in his name, receive his forgiveness and love and then go about showing that same forgiveness and love to others.

In verse 9, when Jesus says he is not praying for the world, he does not do it in a fit of anger, as if the world doesn't matter to him. It's not about seeking revenge for what the worldly people are about to do to him. No, Jesus' thoughts are for all people, especially those who hear his word and listen. Those who reject his love and grace pull themselves out of his prayer concern. Instead Jesus is praying for all those who come to believe and receive God's grace. This concern is what takes him to do the very next action, to go out to the garden and offer up his life as a sacrifice for all the world so that all may come to believe. But Jesus knows even as he does this sacrifice, there will be some of this world who refuse to receive that gift. He has shown them what he is about, he has talked about the kingdom of God, he has shown his love and compassion, he has displayed his power over illness, sickness, and even death. But some are so intent on their own agendas and intentions, they will see nothing beyond themselves. And so Jesus prays for all those who can see and hear and believe in God's word, those who rely on God's grace, and desire to come into the Lord's presence.

We too remember the church in our prayers. Each week we offer up prayers –just like this week that we start the prayer of intercession with “we lift up to God all those in need in the

church and throughout the world.” Those people in need in the church and throughout the world are all part of God’s kingdom, which makes them part of the living church. And for them we pray for faith, strength, healing, wisdom and witness. This is the example that Christ leaves for us. To pray remember all those who are in need. We pray beyond our own needs because that is what Christ was doing here in his high priestly prayer. That is another beautiful part of being the church of God, and us being members of it. By being a member of the Church and making that commitment to God, to each other and to the future generations of Christian we are promising to look beyond ourselves. So much of our week is tied up in our own needs, wants, problems and concerns. But as the church we are taken beyond that to see, hear and respond to those around us near and far, ones we know and people we may never meet. The church take us beyond ourselves to see and hear and respond to those throughout the world, making us an ever-outward looking faith.

In my first church, there was a member who had many physical problems, he was on dialysis and had heart problems, not to mention some other conditions that had him in and out of the hospital for a few years. He knew his time was short on this earth. But he hadn’t been a regular church attendee. The last two years of his life he started coming to church each week. People told me that it probably was because he was scared of dying. To many people he was an unpleasant man and over opinionated, saying what ever he wanted, which made him look grumpy to almost everyone who ever met him. He was a lawyer and actually still serving as a Judge, so he did like to argue and get into verbal debates about every issue, including every time we met to talk about the church. I was even told that he was my biggest enemy in the church because he never agreed with anyone and never would agree with me.

But I liked him. Yes we argued about issues, but it was a good debate, he made points and I would make points. I got to trust him He wasn’t bashful and he would bring up issues that others were scared to voice. Things that need to be pushed and examined, that everyone else was worried to even think about. So with all his pushing and arguing at meeting and congregational meetings, people assumed that we didn’t get along.

But I saw another side to this man. I knew a man who had faith, who believed in God, who wasn’t scared of dying because he knew the promise of Jesus Christ. During the last few months of his life when I visited him in the hospital, I would ask what he wanted to pray for today. And what people didn’t know was he never prayed for himself. Sometimes people ask for healing sometimes they ask to enter into God’s kingdom. He would insist we pray for his wife, for the church and for me. He would embarrass me telling me that he wished me well at the church and that I needed prayers because of the life of the church that continues on with all its

struggles. He didn't ask for prayers for himself, instead he asked for prayers for those who remain, he was truly a man of outward thinking faith.

Jesus prays for God's glory to be done and for his people that remain and those who will follow. "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one." Jesus reaches out his hands on that final night before his death and prays for you. He knows what is about to happen that horrors that will be taking place on that dark Friday and yet he prays for his followers, those who hear his word and believe. That they may be one with God. He prays outward to all and for all. May we receive that prayer and turn and do likewise in our prayer life, praying beyond ourselves but to others known and unknown, people near and far, prayers for all who are part of God's one true family in all places and times. Let us pray to God as one church, universal. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.