

## **Jesus' High Priestly Prayer**

John 17:6-20

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The 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Our text for this morning takes us back to the night of the last supper. The meal is over; the awkwardness of the foot washing has been dealt with; the conversation is finished. In a few minutes Jesus and the disciples will leave the upper room and make their way to the Mount of Olives. They will stop at the Garden of Gethsemane where the Roman soldiers will arrest Jesus. It is a moment of transition. Jesus' earthly ministry is at its end, the cross and the resurrection lay ahead just around the corner. Before they leave the dinner table Jesus offers up one more prayer – a prayer not for himself, but for his disciples. This is a moment of transition in their lives too. They have been disciples, followers, students of this rabbi from Nazareth in Galilee. After the cross and the resurrection they will be more than that, but what and how has yet to be revealed to them. So Jesus prays for the twelve and their families who are gathered together with him on that night, but he doesn't stop there, he also prays for all who will come to believe through the word and witness of these first disciples. In other words, Jesus prays for all believers throughout all of time, including us. Jesus prays for us, and for our times of transition, when we are caught in that liminal space, on the threshold between the past and the future.



Jesus' prayer is, therefore, especially relevant for the graduates we will lift up this morning. Our high school seniors and college graduates rejoicing in their accomplishments, poised to begin a new phase in their studies and/or careers. Our children who have come faithfully to church and Sunday School throughout this program year. Jesus' prayer is also highly relevant for those of us who are in transition in other ways: completing or beginning medical treatments, finishing or embarking on projects, jobs, or careers, ending or starting relationships, in the midst of changes, challenges and crises.

### **Promises for living in a broken world**

Jesus' prayer is not just a list of wishes or hopes that Jesus has for us, they are promises from God that address the reality of living in this world, created by God but ravaged by forces that are not-God. Drought and famine, tornado and hurricane, earthquake and tsunami that destroy lives and homes are evidence of the brokenness of creation. Poverty, discrimination, crime, violence point to the brokenness of human societies. Broken relationships and broken hearts, fear and hatred, crippling and life-stealing diseases reveal all too clearly that human lives are in bondage to forces that are not-God.

Yet God loves this world and all of its inhabitants, because God created it and them. This world and all its creatures, including us, come from God and belong to God. God loves this world so much that God entered into this broken world as one of us. God came to us as Jesus, not to judge and condemn but to save (John 3:17), to heal and restore, to reconcile and make whole again.

### **Jesus protects us**

And so, it is no surprise then that in verse 15, we hear Jesus telling God not to take us out of this world but to protect us from the evil one. Reality check #1. God will not take us out of this beautiful, but sadly broken world. Believing in Jesus is not a ticket to another world in a galaxy far, far away. Following Jesus is not some kind of magic that will keep us from getting sick or losing our jobs or fighting with our loved ones. Discipleship is not a way out of our problems, it is a way through them. Jesus promises us a way through, not a way out. And so, Jesus promises repeatedly to protect and guard us from the evil one (verses 11, 12, and 15).

### **We will always belong to Jesus**

Jesus promises to protect us because we belong to him, because we belong to God even before we belong to Jesus. Each and every one of us comes from God and belongs to God, even before Christ claims us as his own in the waters of baptism. In verse 10, we hear that everyone who belongs to Jesus also belongs to God, and everyone who belongs to God also belongs to Jesus. It seems to me that means all people, everywhere, without exception. Jesus promises to protect us because we will always belong to God no matter what we do, no matter what happens to us. Even when we think we are lost, and especially when we think we are so broken that no one could possibly care for us, we will still belong to God. Jesus will always be there for us, promising to protect us from the evil one, so that we can get through all the brokenness in our lives.

### **Jesus sanctifies us**

We belong to God and Jesus, who not only protects us but who promises to "sanctify" us. Sanctify is a special Bible word that means Jesus wants to heal our brokenness so that we can become more and more like him. Jesus wants to fill our hearts with God's love and joy until there is no more room for fear, anger, hatred, or any other negative emotion or thought. All those forces in the world that are not-God just loves negative emotions and thoughts. They feed on them and grow stronger, causing more and more brokenness in our lives and in the world around

us. Jesus promises to change all that by filling us with God's love and joy until we become whole and complete, holy and righteous, living in right relations with God, the world, and each other.

### **Jesus sends us**

Protected, sanctified, and secure in knowing we belong to God, Jesus sends us into the world. Jesus has a job for us to do. There are people in our homes, workplaces, schools and neighborhoods who do not know that God loves them. There are people all around us who actually think God hates them. They have been told over and over again that they are not worthy of love and respect, that they are not good enough because they're too young, too old, too big, too little, too queer, too poor, too black, too brown, too red, too yellow, too dumb, too sick, too whatever. Our job as followers of Jesus is to **show *and* tell** everyone the good news that God does love them, that God's love makes them good enough, that Christ yearns to walk with them through all the brokenness of their lives, and fill their hearts with God's love and joy until there is no room for anything else.

So.... I have a clipboard out in the narthex for you all to sign-up for this mission — to go into your homes, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods and tell everyone this good news. Just kidding! I don't really have a clipboard. I don't need one. Here's the thing. Everyone of us is already signed up for this mission. We were signed up the moment Christ claimed us in the waters of baptism. We re-muster for this mission every time we come to the Lord's table. Because we are Lutherans our natural strategy for mission is to proclaim the gospel at all times but only if absolutely necessary, and as a last resort, to use words. God's Work. Our Hands is the ELCA's tag line for a very good reason. All of us have the opportunity to engage in God's mission every day of our lives. All of us can show love and respect to the people we deal with on a daily basis. Some of us work in helping and service professions that have the potential to make really positive differences in the lives of people. Even those who don't work face-to-face with other people do God's work with their hands as their work contributes to making the world a better and safer place for all of God's children.

Whatever moment of transition you are in today and in the days ahead, cling to these truths. You belong to God — you always have and you always will. You have been claimed by Christ who will protect you through all the problems and challenges of your life by filling your heart with God's love and joy until there is room for nothing else. Jesus sends you into the world with all gifts, talents and energy you need to make a positive difference in the world around you.

Please pray with me:

Lord Jesus, thank you for claiming us as your own, for protecting and guarding us, for filling us with your love and joy. Help us today and every day do your work with our hands, and the courage to use words more often to tell your story. Amen.