

May 29, 2022

John 17:20-26

“Jesus Prays for Us!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have always found our gospel lesson for this morning to be incredibly heartwarming. While every passage of the Bible applies to us in some way or another, it is especially touching to know that during his earthly ministry, Jesus prayed for those of us who would live in the future. It is like the passage in Hebrews 12:2 where it says that Jesus endured the cross "... for the joy set before him ..." That means that he went to the cross and became sin for us in view of the joy that all of us would have in being with each other in heaven with him. If that fails to strike a heartstring within us then it might very well be that we have become cold and indifferent. May the Lord God spare us from that!

Our gospel lesson begins with Jesus saying: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word ..." That's you and me he's talking about. **Jesus Prays for Us!** And what exactly is Jesus asking for when it comes to us? The answer lies in the verses before and after verse twenty. Before this verse we see that Jesus wants us to have his joy fulfilled in us. He asks that we may be kept from the evil one while we continue to live in this fallen world. He wants us to be sanctified in the truth. And he announces that his word is truth and to have his word is to ultimately have him. As a human being, Jesus sanctifies himself, that is, lives a holy life that we may be holy in him.

But it doesn't stop there. After the verse, Jesus goes on to pray that we may be one with him and the Father as well as with each other so that the world may believe that the Father has sent his Son. What do you think Jesus means by these words? What does it mean to be one with God and with each other? This is a very difficult question to answer in the short space of a sermon so I will try to get the heart of the matter as quickly as possible.

Humanity is on a quest for human oneness: one order, one people, one government, one way of thought and life, one society. Make no mistake about it, there is a very real quest for unity because humanity is shattered by sin and death, and people believe that if the pieces can be brought together all can be made right with the world. However, there will always be varying opinions on what true unity is and so there will always be an ongoing disunity. This is why various individuals want to be in power. They think that if they are in control that they will be able to enforce their way of thinking on every one else and finally achieve harmony in this shattered world. This is a delusion.

What we learn in our text is that true and holy oneness or unity can only happen among believers in the holy Jesus. We believers are united with each other only by being united with him. That which unites us in holiness is the gospel and Sacraments. They are a fellowship or participation with Jesus and the Father. The smallest faith joins us to God and to the body of Christ, which is the church. But this is only the beginning as we consider that Christ prays for the oneness of his disciples. So, while the smallest faith makes us the one body of Christ, we can also say that because of our sinful flesh this is only the beginning. We are both one by faith and we are growing in oneness. This is the burden of Jesus prayer.

We have no Christ and no God without the Word. We also have no oneness among ourselves without the Word. There is much that attacks this. But the more we have of the Word in our hearts by faith

and thus reigning in our lives, the more perfect is our oneness. And we look forward to the day when it will be perfect in the face of Christ. In his commentary, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, R. C. H. Lenski writes: "We are as much one with each other and with God and with Christ as we believe, teach, live, and confess all that is contained in the Word. Every deviation in doctrine, life, and practice from the Word mars and disrupts our oneness and hinders the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer." Jesus prayer is being fulfilled when our thoughts, words, and deeds are brought into conformity with the Word of Scripture.

In verse 21 of our gospel lesson, our Lord Jesus not only asks for unity among his disciples but a oneness "... so that the world may believe that [the Father has] sent [him]." Luther comments: "This is the fruit which is to follow from this oneness, namely that Christ's Word is to break forth more and more and be accepted in the world as God's Word, in which an almighty, divine, unconquerable power and treasure of all grace and blessedness reside." The greater our unity is in the Word, the greater will be our victories in this shattered world. On the other hand, the more schism, heresy, and ignorance there is in the midst of the church, the less will be our victories. So, like Jesus, we pray for the unity of the church.

In verse 24 Jesus prays: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." It is good to keep in mind that Jesus prays this as he is about to go to the cross to suffer and die to complete his salvation for which he was sent. Following that will come his resurrection from the dead. For forty days he will appear to his disciples until he ascends into heaven which foreshadows the day in which we will be in the place where he is. So, when Jesus prays for us to be with him where he is to see him in his glory, he is asking that we would be preserved in the faith to see him in his full beauty - face to face - the beautiful vision that causes eternal joy. Jesus is talking about our forever life with him in paradise. John writes in his first epistle (3:1-3):

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

While the unbelieving world does everything in its power to put back together the pieces of this shattered world, we realize that things will never be made right until we are in the face of Jesus and the new creation he brings. In other words, anything that is pure down here today is only pure by faith in him. And if we would have a forever, pure place, it can only be found in his righteousness and all that he gives in his mercy.

There is more of this theme in our second reading for today. In our epistle lesson we are given a vivid and most comforting description of the new Jerusalem, where what is shattered is finally made perfect. In the chapter before our second reading, the lasting city of Jerusalem is described in powerful picture language as "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:22)." The city is the one, holy bride adorned for her one, holy husband. We are that city. Paul

wrote to the Corinthians: “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Cor. 11:2).” And that brings us to our second reading and a most vivid and comforting description of what the new world will be like - our forever world with the Son and the Father:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

The water of life will quench all our thirst for righteousness - for the right place. The tree of life, who is Jesus will be the forever food that will satisfy. The leaves of the tree are his wounds by which we are forever healed. God and his Lamb will rule all things for the good of his people so that they will receive every good thing. The name of our Maker and Redeemer will rest upon our foreheads so that every thought will conform to the truth. The city will shine with the glory (the revelation) of the Lord God. And we will share in his victory and joy forever. This is the fulfilment of Jesus prayer for us. Amen. Let it be so!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott