

Jesus Prays for Unity and Witness

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Tyson Labuhn

Christ has Risen. He is Risen indeed Alleluia! Amen.

Today is the 7th and last Sunday of Easter. It's the Sunday between the day of Jesus' Ascension and the day of Pentecost. It's a pivotal time in the church year, and in our text for today, it was also a pivotal time for Jesus and His disciples.

Once again, our text begins in the Upper Room, because it's there, as we've seen over the past couple of Sundays, that Jesus was able to provide comfort to His disciples, strengthen them, and encourage them for what was about to take place. As we heard in our Gospel text, which is part of Jesus' longest recorded prayer, He reveals His love for us and prays for our unity and witness.

He looks up to Heaven and prays, "Father, the hour has come . . ." (v. 1a) because He knew that His time had come, and after His prayer, He would go to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas would betray Him, and He would be arrested, tried, and judged. He would be tortured and then nailed to the cross to die. And yet, He went on to pray, "[Glorify] Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (v. 1b).

Jesus didn't want to be glorified for His own sake but rather that He might be glorified in the Father. Because in what He knew was to come, He would willingly allow Himself to appear powerless, and His death, which at first would seem insignificant. And yet, through it all, He wanted the world, and especially His disciples, to be able to see God's glory so that all who had been given to Him might have eternal life. According to His prayer, eternal life means "to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who was sent by Him" (v. 3). Not just intellectually but in a personal relationship with Him.

He prayed that His disciples would catch a glimpse of His relationship with the Father, that their faith would continue to be

nourished and strengthened in ways they had never known before. And while Jesus had spent time with them, teaching and preparing them to share the Word of God, their relationship with Him was precious. And yet, He went on to say, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (v. 5), because He knew that after His prayer, He would go out with His disciples into a cruel, cruel world where they would question and doubt whether or not Jesus truly is the Son of God. On Good Friday, the very next day, they would see the crowds mock Jesus as He hung on the cross to die, and some of them would even hear Him say, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

When they heard Him say those words, they might have wondered if the Father had heard Jesus’ prayer about being glorified because it didn’t seem like Jesus’ ministry would continue beyond His disciples. And it certainly didn’t seem like Jesus had been honored, praised, or celebrated because the cross was a way to torture and execute someone. It didn’t bring honor, praise, or glory to those who experienced it. And yet today, now that the cross is no longer used for execution, people have begun to wonder just how powerful the cross of Christ really is.

They see the cross more in terms of decoration or a piece of jewelry that looks nice, as if it has become meaningless and emptied of its power. Because they don’t see the cross as a way that actually glorifies God or His Son. But our Lord’s prayer was answered by the Father, and for those of us who believe, it has become a symbol of the love and grace that God has for us. St. Paul once shared with the church in Colossae that the cross is where God graciously forgives us all our trespasses and cancels all records of our sin. Through His glorious death on the cross, He overcame sin, death, and the devil for us.

And yet, the unity and witness of Jesus’ disciples would become increasingly important as they continued to face difficult lives even after Jesus ascended into heaven. They would return to the Upper

Room to regroup and remember this prayer when He interceded for them.

Jesus knew this would happen, and so He prayed to the Father that they might be encouraged, saying, “I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that You have given Me is from You” (v. 6-7). It was by grace that they were taught God’s Word, and when He preached to them, they had actually listened and were encouraged in their faith.

Today, this gives us hope and encouragement because each one of us faces difficulties, trials, and hardships from time to time. And when this happens, the world, the devil, and our own sinfulness can use hard times to question our faith, encouraging us to lose perspective and leading us into temptation. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus, instead of saying “woe is me,” we are reminded to see the joy in life because eternal life comes through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Steven Covey, author of “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” once wrote: “I value my children. I love them, I want to help them. I value my role as their father. I don’t always see those values in myself when I get caught up in the ‘thick and thin things.’ What matters most often gets buried under layers of pressing problems, immediate concerns, and outward behaviors. When I become more and more reactive, the way that I interact with my children often bears little resemblance to the way I deeply feel about them.”

And yet, Jesus, seated on His throne of grace, is watching over me, caring for me, and praying for me, helping us all to keep our perspective. Even when we can’t see, we can trust that He can see ahead and will “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

So, Jesus gets more specific in His prayer for His disciples, saying, “I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me. For they are Yours” (v. 9). This doesn’t

mean that He doesn't care about the world, but He is praying specifically for His disciples, that they would go out and share God's Word, and through their discipleship, the world might be saved.

Because, as He went on to pray, "I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as we are One."

And as Christians, we know this is easier said than done. Each of us has been called into this unity that we call the church, that we might go out from here and share God's Word with the world around us. But many of us still haven't quite learned how to disagree in love or love those with whom we disagree. Instead, we're like the poet who once wrote: "To dwell above with saints we love, that will be grace and glory, but to live below with saints we know; well, that's another story!"

So today, on this 7th and last Sunday of Easter, we see how our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for our unity and witness. He knew that it wouldn't always come easy, especially during pivotal times in the church. And so, in the Upper Room before His death, He comforted, strengthened, and encouraged His disciples. He prayed that their unity and witness might model His relationship with the Father for us, so that we might be one as He is one with the Father. Through His cross and resurrection, we might receive God's love, grace, and forgiveness, enabling us to live new resurrected lives where we come together in faith and then go out into the world, boldly sharing His Word with all those around us. So that more people might receive the eternal life He came to bring, and our great God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—might have all glory and honor, both now and always.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.