

Our Mission is Sharing God's Love

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Tyson Labuhn

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This morning, it's my hope that we're all going to be a little more hopeful, encouraged, and comforted that all of our lives might be a little better. Over the past year, not only have we been dealing with the effects of the Coronavirus, but we've done a great job of following the CDC, state, and local safety guidelines. And while several of our members contracted the Coronavirus, their cases were not traced back to our church campus. With so many people coming and going in and around our church campus it seems "out of this world" that something didn't go wrong. And yet, time and time again, God watches over us. Interceding on our behalf. So we ought to pray and thank God for all His benefits...But I also want to thank you for your patience, because not only have we done well following the safety guidelines, but over the course of the past year, we've used our time wisely to see how biblical our mission statement is through our sermon series. And so today we're covering the last part of our mission statement sermon series – "Sharing God's Love."

It just so happens that in our Gospel reading we hear the last part of what some consider to be Jesus' farewell discourse and more specifically part of Jesus' high priestly prayer. It was spoken there in the upper room, according to St. John, just after He said to the disciples, ***"if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you***

and other Helper, to be with you forever...”(John 14:15-16)

After He shared with them the parable of the vineyard...that He is the true vine, and His Father is the vinedresser and that they ought to love one another as He has loved them. (John 15:12) And giving His reason for saying these things to them, when He said to them, ***“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.”*** (John 16:1) Why would He say all of this beforehand? Because the world simply doesn't know Him or the love He came to share.

Now in our Gospel reading, Jesus goes on to pray to the Father about finishing up His mission while here on earth, that His disciples might know His mission – their mission – as well as the mission of those who would come after Him. Why? Because He had called them out of this world to be His own. As you know, Matthew's occupation was a tax collector. Peter, James, and John became fishers of men. And while Judas had left the upper room before Jesus prayed, Judas had already chosen greed and left them. And yet, Jesus wanted to protect and keep His disciples from evil. So, while He was with them, He taught them His Word, even if they didn't always understand. And, as we heard, He prayed for them...

And yet, He also prays for those who would come after them as well. He prays for our protection from the world in which we live. In a sense, from our own worldliness. Because even then, He knew that we'd spend more of our time doing worldly things, rather than reading His Word and being in church. And He knew, even then, that left on our own we are anything but holy. Even within us, within our selfish worldliness, we can be God's enemy, and so, interceding on our behalf, Jesus prays to the Father.

Of course, He knew what was about to happen next. His prayer was just before His betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and death for us. So that by His innocent suffering and death, by His very blood, we might be made holy. You see, He prays to the Father, for His disciples, and for us, that even in this unholy world, we might be holy. He willingly gave Himself, so that by grace through faith, we might be saved. And yet, this love of God extends beyond His disciples, beyond us, out into the whole world. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Having been called to be His own through Holy Baptism, He doesn't rescue us or call us in order to leave the world behind, but He rather He equips us to work together so that the mission of the Kingdom might continue to be fulfilled. He prays that we might be sent out into a world that has been darkened by sin and evil so that our faith-filled lives might be holy, shining beacons of light for those who still sit in darkness. Those, who even today, need to receive the love and grace that comes from God.

Last Thursday, the church celebrated Ascension Day, the day when our Lord ascended into heaven. Today, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, because He knows that evil is alive and constantly attacking us...And yet, He doesn't give up on us. Just like He didn't give up on Peter, who denied Him three times. Instead, He said to Peter, ***"But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, [you] strengthen your brothers."*** (NIV: Luke 22:32) That, of course, was Peter's mission...

No matter how difficult you might think that life is, we can think of Jesus – who just before He's about to be arrested and

crucified for us, prays even for us, out of His great love. Just imagine if we prayed and shared God's love like this, willingly, giving of ourselves, for others? As St. Paul shares in Romans, if God is for us, who can be against us? The world does not know this kind of love, because God's love is simply *"out of this world!"*

You know, the words Jesus spoke in His farewell discourse, and more specifically during His prayer, bring words of hope, comfort, and encouragement to His disciples as well as to us, who have come after them. They remind us of our mission. Jesus prays for us, that we might continue His mission, even though we might've become distracted by all that has happened in the world over the past year. It's time to turn back to Him, in order to move forward strengthened by Him for our mission. And you know our mission here at Our Savior's Way is to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming Relationships, Experiencing Jesus Together, and Sharing God's Love.

In Jesus' name, Amen.