

The Sunday after Ascension, Sunday, June 2, 2019, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:20-26

***"A Message of Hope"***

The setting for today's Holy Gospel is on the way from the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives. We learned in last week's Holy Gospel from John 14:31 that Jesus said to those present in the Upper Room, "*Come now; let us leave.*" Jesus would often go off alone and pray, but here He is walking with the Apostles to the Garden of Gethsemane. Here we are so blessed to have the words of Jesus as He prayed before His Apostles and disciples on the night of His arrest. This is a part of what has been called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

The first part of this prayer is Jesus celebrating the fact that His work is done, His work that He has been given. He has completed the absolutely overwhelming tasks that He was given to do. Jesus has shown the disciples all that He was given to do was from the Father. His request to the Father is that He be exalted, glorified and lifted up to the position of Jewish tradition – that of the Messiah, the anointed one, the Son of Man. The Messiah's Kingdom is described in Psalm 72:8 "*He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*" One like the "Son of Man" which was described by Daniel in his chapter 7, whose followers will be given the gift of eternal life, just as we can see through John's Gospel. John's Gospel is full of blessings, of miracles, and a message of hope, and of the promise of eternal life. Jesus does not want this relationship to be exclusive and instead He invites everyone to join in.

Jesus now prays because He is going away and is entrusting His disciples to His loving heavenly Father. Jesus asks the Father to protect all of the ones that He loves. (John 17:12) "*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*" Of course He is talking about Judas – who betrayed the Savior. Jesus prays of the need for them, and us, to be protected from being "drawn" back into the world with all of its wickedness and rebellion. Jesus looked over them while He was with them – He was their shepherd, and He still is our shepherd.

Jesus addresses His Father as "holy" – which means 'set apart' - and says that He is setting Himself apart so that His disciples and followers can be set apart as well. "*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.*" (John 17:20-22) Jesus is pleading for us and for all who would eventually believe in Him. He asks one thing - for us to be united in faith "*to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*" He speaks of a "oneness" that you can see; a visible demonstration to a world that is always watching, so that they might see that Jesus is real, that He was sent by God, and that He still lives and continues to transform lives. Those eyes that were watching then – are watching now. How many people have an ICTHUS? That is the little fish that you put on the back of your car – that tells the world you are a Christian? If you have one of those – that is great, you are making a statement

to the world, but if you do have one – people are watching you! They want to see that when you get cut off what your reaction will be. Do you smile and change to the other lane or do you use some hand gestures or get awfully upset and let the fuse explode. It happens. People are watching. I just want you to be aware of that. They watch people who wear collars – to see how we respond. People are surprised when I or one of the deacons walk into a supermarket or store – they are watching. I can remember going into a store named Wegman’s in the Buffalo area. Marilyn and I had only been there a few years and she came to the church and we had a shopping list – so I am pushing the carriage – (Note: I have since been informed that here in Georgia those things are called “buggies”). And this woman came around the corner with her basket and she looked at me – and she had this crazy look in here eyes. “what are you doing here” she said. I responded we have got to eat too. She just looked at me with that crazed look. I said to her “God bless you; it was nice to meet you.” She took off like a... - you know what I mean! Every word that Jesus spoke in the Bible – is real! It is the truth – and so we can now witness the reality of Jesus and His love. We need to be reading the Bible regularly, if not daily. Even if it just a couple of words, you will find yourself feeling comfort and peace. You will find yourself hungry and want to read more. We need to be reading the Bible regularly. The best place to start – I promise you - is the Gospel of John. It is easy to read and it reveals who Jesus is on every page.

Jesus appeals to His heavenly Father for us to be able to see a glimpse of His eternal glory, and to let us be with Him for all eternity: *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”* (John 17:24) Here is a truth that you must not forget; Jesus is NOT creation; Jesus is the Creator; and that is a truth that is undeniable. Creation was spoken into being by the Word. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Jesus is the living and Incarnate Word.

This amazing prayer that Jesus prays for us is ultimately for unity; the unity of believers which should have an effect on others, and will convince them of the mission of Christ. Jesus' prayer is a rebuke of the groundless and often bitter divisions among believers – quite often over the culture dictating what are called “new truths” instead of looking to the one truth that we have been given – the unchanging Word of God – both written and Incarnate. It truly breaks my heart when I hear people start to change what the God’s Holy Word says, all for political correctness, not wanting to offend anyone. There are those that have been saying ‘that there are many ways to the God,’ omitting the Father, and saying many ways to God. Jesus said in John 14:6 *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Let’s face it, those are Jesus’ words, and you either believe them or you don’t. If you don’t – what are you calling Jesus? A liar! C. S. Lewis said that Jesus is “either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.” I refer to think that He is Lord. The words from today’s Gospel reading are so true, but the words our reading from the Book of Revelation remind us that we are not to change anything! *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of*

The Sunday after Ascension, Sunday, June 2, 2019, Year C

*life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*" (Revelation 22:18-19) Jesus said it and we are to believe and stand on His words. People that change God's word are so self-absorbed. That is sad, to be sure.

Jesus continues to pray: "*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.*" (John 17:25-26) Jesus is calling the Father righteous, and as judge over all the earth – He will see that righteousness will prevail – and it will be through the work that Jesus is now about to finish in just hours! Someone asked me just the other day 'why does everyone have to be judged?' You see God is a fair God and He wanted everyone to have the same opportunity. Those who believe in Jesus Christ have the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you have repented of your sins – when you stand before Judgment – your unrighteousness will not be seen – but instead the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and therefore you will be washed whiter than white. If you remember Jesus' words of the Sheep and the Goats, you will be told to come and partake of His Kingdom. Those who don't know Jesus, who don't follow Him, will be told to "*depart from Me!*" (Matthew 25:41) It is all about knowing Jesus and believing in Him.

Earlier that evening in the upper room Jesus told His disciples, and these words bear repeating, "*In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.*" Thomas said to him, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*" Jesus answered, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:2-6) The Father always answers His Son's prayers, so we know that believers who die will have eternal life with God. What a great promise and message of hope.

God spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah nearly 700 years before Jesus was born, giving a fallen world a message of hope. This is a message that everyone needs to hear. God has not given up on sinners! He said: "*for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.*" (Jeremiah 29:11) His message is one of hope of forgiveness of sin, and a future to spend eternity with God, Himself.

Jesus' high priestly prayer is a prayer for each one of us that we will be given the strength to continue the work that He has given us to do in a world that tries its best to throw everyone off course; to love and serve Him as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord, in spite of all of the distractions and contradictions that we are up against.

Lord God, we pray that you would help us to keep your Word and share your love – so that we will be sharing your truth, your love and Your message of hope, and faithfully letting others see Your light shine within us.