

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 24, 2020, Year A

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:1-11

***"Our High Priest"***

It is funny, I saw something on Facebook, I have spending a lot of time on Facebook because I have been posting our services there as well as messages. On Ascension Thursday, a post said, "Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus is working from home!" You know what that is all about, don't you?

If you had the opportunity to ask anyone to stand up for you and intercede before God for your needs – who would it be? My choice is any easy one – and that is our Savior and great High Priest – Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah.

Today's Holy Gospel from John is a prayer that Jesus prays and is as much for all of us as it was for the Apostles on the night that He was arrested. As a matter of fact – the entire 17<sup>th</sup> chapter is known as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. Like our previous Gospel readings the past few weeks, Jesus is with the Apostles in the Upper Room and He begins this prayer thanking the Father for revealing the truth through Him of His Word and helping Him to complete the work that He has been given by the Father to do. In verse 11 Jesus says, "*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.*" This 'high priestly prayer' is made up of four special requests by Jesus of the Father.

Jesus makes His first request for us to be protected and for unity. Jesus prayed "*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.*" Jesus asks for the Father to give a sense of oneness to us. Jesus is not praying for 'uniformity' – that we would all walk in stride, all dress alike and copy one another but instead that the church might believe in Him and walk together in that very truth. Christ was praying for unity – not uniformity.

Jesus then prays in verse 12 – the one immediately following our Gospel lesson, "*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.*" He points to the loss of Judas' betrayal – "*doomed to destruction,*" Jesus wanted the remaining eleven apostles to be in one accord – for the purpose of being united in the ministry that He has charged them, and charged us with – to bring the truth of His Gospel to the world – so that everyone might believe in Him.

This morning, Jay Vickers read from the first chapter of the Book of Acts, the timing of which tells us that Jesus walked the earth for forty days: forty days – not from Passover but forty days since His resurrection. There are about seven days left until Pentecost. One week before Pentecost Jesus told the disciples these words: "*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) Folks, welcome to the ends of the earth! That is where we live, that is where the Gospel is to go out to – and from. Just before that He said you will receive the Holy Spirit in just a few days. Seven days until Pentecost, and

they will receive, fully receive the Holy Spirit, so that we might be in one accord, with the courage to share the Gospel with others – as witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Jesus' second request of the Father: Jesus requests that His joy would fill them, and continues saying that the prayer He is praying is being heard by them so that they might be filled with His full measure of joy. Most of the prayers that Jesus prayed were not written down by the apostles and were most likely prayed in the solitude of His alone prayer time with the Father. Remember Jesus would go to the hillside to pray? This time – just like Jesus' prayer at Lazarus' tomb – He wants His words to resound and be carried into the hearts of all believers – despite the hate that would be aimed at believers by the world. Jesus delighted in fulfilling the Father's will and He wants us to have delight as well, gladness and joy in our relationship with the Father.

I believe that there is a serious misconception in the world today that Christians are supposed to be doormats, sullen and straight-laced – but here Jesus is asking that those who believe in Him would be filled with His joy. Laughter is good for the soul; smiling is not unforgivable and don't forget singing! We are given God's joy so that it would radiate in Christians faces. The light of Christ's love should shine, as you reflect His love. The truth is – living for Jesus offers the highest pleasure in life.

Later in verses 17 to 20 – Jesus asked the Father to *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.”* Jesus was set apart to bring Glory to the Father – and so He asked the Father to set us apart as well – so that we would do the same.

Jesus wants His believers to be set free from the darkness of sin – so that the world would know that God is in control. Jesus wants the world to see that His believers – Christians, are different. He loves each one who acknowledges Him as Savior and Lord so much that He would go to the cross for each one of us – being given the freedom from sin and death, replacing that dread and darkness with light and joy - that can be shown to the rest of the world – showing them that we have what they are searching for. Jesus wants all believers sanctified so that the world would know that we are loved beyond belief.

Jesus also prays to the Father, in His fourth request, for our eternal place with Him when He prays in verse 24, *“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.”* Jesus always was and always will be! Doesn't that remind you of the words that we heard just two weeks ago, that Jesus said earlier that very evening when He spoke to the disciples as recorded in John 14:3 *“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.”* Isn't that exciting? His promises are exciting, and they are always kept.

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I find it absolutely amazing that Jesus spent some of the final moments on the earth, of His life praying for and interceding on behalf of all believers –not just those who were present in the room, and expressing His hopes for all humanity. These requests should give us hope and a future. This reminds me of the words that God Himself spoke through the Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:11 where He says *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* How humbling it is that we can see Jesus’ love for us and know the hope that comes from this prayer that Jesus prayed on our behalf.

I believe it all boils down to this – God the Son, prayed:

- for our protection and unity,
- that His joy would fill each and every one of us, each and every day.
- for us to be set apart for sacred use – sanctified,
- and that we would come to the place that He has prepared for us – that we may be where He is.

What a tremendous example for us believers to follow – and pray these things for each other – in Jesus’ Name.