

The Sunday after Ascension, Sunday, May 29, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:20-26

“Jesus, Our High Priest”

Jesus and the Apostles are walking from the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives. You might remember that 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.”* In today's Holy Gospel we 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 is called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

Jesus celebrating the fact that the work that He has been given is now done. He has completed the absolutely overwhelming tasks that He was given. Jesus has shown the disciples all that He was given to do was from the Father and so He asks 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. It says, *“He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”* One like the “Son of Man” 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, miracles, a message of hope, and the promise of eternal life. Jesus does not want this relationship to be ‘exclusive’, but instead He invites everyone to join in.

Jesus prays since He is going away and is entrusting His disciples to His loving, heavenly Father. Jesus asks His Father to protect all of the ones that He loves. In John 17:12 He prays, *“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 Jesus is talking about Judas, the betrayer. Jesus prays 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 calls His Father “holy” – which means ‘set apart’ - and says that He is setting Himself apart so that His apostles 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 believe and all who would eventually believe in Him as well. 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 the world that is always watching, so that they might see that Jesus is real, sent by God, and that He still lives and continues to transform lives. Those eyes that were watching then – are watching now. It happens. People are watching. I just want you to be aware of that. People are always judging others!

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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) I want you to always remember that 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 – the Word made flesh.

This amazing prayer that Jesus prays is for unity; the unity of all 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 – very often over the culture that dictates what are called “new truths” instead of looking to the one truth that we have been given – the unchanging Word of God. It really breaks my heart when I hear people start to change what the Bible says, interjecting political correctness, all because they don't want to offend anyone. Some people 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.”* Those are the words of Jesus, and you either believe them or you don't. If you don't, you are calling Jesus a liar! I believe 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 in the Bible! Our reading says, *“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 life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”* (Revelation 22:18-19) Those are Jesus' words and we must stand on them. How sad it is that people that change God's word are so self-absorbed.

Jesus continued 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 His Father righteous, and as judge over all the earth, He will see that righteousness will prevail, and it will be through the Jesus' work that He will finish in just hours! Those who believe in Jesus Christ will be covered by His righteousness. If you have repented of your sins, when you stand in Judgment, the righteousness of Jesus Christ will be seen and not your own unrighteousness, 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*

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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 the world a message of hope, 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) That 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. We are 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. It is important to remember that Jesus, our High Priest, went to the cross to save you, and that is how important you are to Him.