

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 8, 2016, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:20-26

"A Prayer For Us"

The setting for today's Holy Gospel reading is once again in the Upper Room during what we often call "the Last Supper." We read in the Gospels that Jesus would often go off alone and pray. We have a few instances where we have the words that Jesus spoke to the Father, like the form that Jesus gave us to pray that we call the "Lord's Prayer," and of course Jesus' praying to the Father in what we often call the "Agony in the Garden" in the Garden of Gethsemane – asking for the cup to pass and submitting to the will of the Father. Here we are so blessed to have the words of Jesus as He prayed before His disciples on the night of His arrest. Throughout John chapter 17 Jesus' words in prayer are called, and rightly so - His "High Priestly Prayer."

The first part is a celebration and a request. Jesus is celebrating the fact that His work is done. You might say that He still has a great deal ahead of Him – but Jesus is celebrating the fact that He has completed the absolutely humongous tasks that He was given to do. He has shown the disciples all that He was given to do. His request 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" as 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 of eternal life. Jesus does not want this relationship to be exclusive and instead He invites us to join in.

Jesus now prays essentially because He is going away. He is entrusting His disciples to His loving heavenly Father. Jesus asks the Father to protect 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.*" The world that Jesus is talking about isn't simply the physical universe – but the world that has rebelled against God, which has chosen darkness rather than light, and has essentially organized itself to oppose the Creator – and His disciples are not a part of that. They need 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 – like a shepherd.

Jesus addresses His Father as "holy" and says that He is setting Himself apart so that His disciples and followers can be set apart as well. Ironically the definition of the word 'holy' means 'to be set apart.' "*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 interceding for us; for all who would eventually believe in Him. He pleads with the Father 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 does this because "oneness" is something

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that you can see; it is 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. When the people who Jesus has called by name, like you and me, show solidarity of passion and purpose, showing that world that we are on the same page – believing in every word Jesus said – my brothers and sisters I am here today to tell you, and to remind you that the “red letters” are real. Every word that Jesus spoke in the Bible – the red letters, are real! They are the truth – and by them others can witness the reality of Jesus and His love. Sometimes, people come to me and say “Father, I haven’t read the Bible very often and I don’t know where to start. The best place to start is the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John shows Jesus as a real person, but also as really God; by the miracles, by the Truth that He tells; by the love that He shares.

Jesus appeals to His heavenly Father to allow us 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) Let me remind you, and this is a thing that is bantered about, and debated – Jesus is NOT creation, Jesus is 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.”* Let there be NO denying that – He is not creation, He is Creator.

Remember that Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a mountain and they witnessed His glory, along with Moses and Elijah. We call this event the Transfiguration. This account from Matthew 17:2 tells us that *“His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.”* And that as a part of His glory revealed *“a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”*” (Matthew 17:5) Those three apostles saw the true glory of Jesus as God’s Son – and now Jesus is asking that those who have been called by Him – will see and share in that same glory. We believers already possess His glory within us through His Holy Spirit, and one day we shall behold His glory in heaven. As we grow in the Lord, the glory within begins to grow and to reveal itself in what we say and do and the way we say and do it. People do not see us and glorify us; they see the Lord and glorify Him who called us.

This amazing prayer that Jesus gives to us and prays for us is ultimately for unity; the unity of believers which should have an effect on outsiders, 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 breaks my heart when I hear people change what the Word of God says – and say that there are many ways to the Father. Please remember the words from today’s reading from the Book of Revelation: 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*

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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) Jesus said it!

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) This is about the love of the Father surrounding Jesus, and this same love, surrounding all of Jesus' people, making Him present to them and through them --- to the entire world. He is calling the Father righteous, and as judge over all the earth – He will see that righteousness will prevail – and it will through the work that Jesus is now about to finish!

The lost world cannot see God, but they can see Christians; and what they see in us is what they will believe about God. If they see love and unity, they will believe that God is love. If they see hatred and division or hypocrisy, they will reject the message of the Gospel. Jesus has assured us that some will believe because of our witness (John 17:20), but we must make sure that our witness is true and loving. Some Christians act like prosecuting attorneys and judges instead of faithful witnesses, and this only turns lost sinners away from our Savior.

I have often used John 17:24 as a text for funeral meditations. Jesus said "*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.*" How do we know that as believers we will see heaven?

- Because of the price that Jesus paid on our behalf,
- the promise that Jesus made – and we know that Jesus keeps His promises,
- and this prayer that Jesus prayed.

On that very same night in the upper room Jesus told His disciples "*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 do go to heaven to behold the glory of God.

God spoke through the Prophet Jeremiah nearly 700 years before Jesus was born giving a fallen world a message of hope, that God has not given up on sinners - "*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.*" (Jeremiah 29:11) His message is one of the hope of forgiveness of sin, and a future to spend eternity with God, Himself. That should be comforting to each one of us tha have lost loved ones, especially on Mother's Day. It is a day where some of us will be able to

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give Mom as hug; some of us will be able to pick up a phone and talk to Mom; and some of us will look to heaven, as I will, and thank God for the love of my mother.

God spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah nearly 700 years before Jesus was born, giving a fallen world a message of hope. 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 He has given us to do in a world that tries its best to throw us 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, help us to keep your word and share your love – so that we will be sharing your truth, and faithfully letting others see your light shine within us.