

“Jesus’ Prayer for You”

John 17: 1-11

Did you know that Jesus prays for you? This past Thursday was the day of the Ascension; the day we celebrate the end of Jesus’ physical presence with us here on Earth as he returned to his Father in Heaven. That event is recalled in our passage from The Acts of the Apostles this morning. But, it’s most often recalled to us by our Confession of faith through the Nicene Creed; you remember...”He ascended into Heaven and sits on the right hand of the father.” Or, as Charles Floto said just yesterday, “It’s the day that Jesus went back to work from home.”

I love that. Now the point of this is that Jesus now prays for us, directly in the presence of God. And now gives you and me direct connection with God through the Holy Spirit. But Jesus didn’t wait until he returned to God to start doing that. He started praying for us even before he went to the Cross. We see this in our lesson from the Gospel According to John this morning. Here we find that prayer that is called Jesus’ great pastoral prayer. It is his prayer for all the faithful who will ever be. It is a prayer that looks across the ages, right down to you and me, and beyond. Jesus is praying for all those who have gone before us, for us now, and all those who will come after us.

Here’s the thing, you and I can put our names right into these petitions this morning, because Jesus is in fact praying for you. You and I are among those whom God has given to our Savior, for whom he was praying then, and is praying now.

It can be easy to miss this wondrous fact in this prayer. The language of it can get a little thick. We can end up wondering just whose is whose, and whose are whom, and whom are...well, you get the idea.

But, with a little study, this passage does become clear. Perhaps the greatest clarity it has to offer us this morning is upon the act of prayer itself. For in this passage we find several guidelines for prayer; powerful yet simple guidelines to help us in our faith.

And the first simple guideline is this: remember to pray. Why do we need a reminder to pray? Well, first, because, in any given day, prayer can become just an afterthought. A Gallup Poll taken in England a few years ago revealed that five out of ten people pray. This seemed pretty good, until it was also revealed that seven out of ten people observed the superstition of tossing spilled salt over their shoulders. Pray needs to be more than an afterthought.

Second, we need the reminder because prayer is often used like a medicine chest; for emergency use only. "Lord, I'm in a jam. Fix it so that two plus two will not make four this time." Prayer is for more than just emergencies.

Third, we need the reminder because it lifts us above our immediate circumstances and reveals life's direction. When homing pigeons are set loose far from home they rise higher and higher in an expanding circle, until they suddenly set out unerringly in the direction that leads home. Prayer gives us our bearings and sets us in the right direction.

As the hard times were upon Jesus, as the climactic hour approached when he was to give his life for us, he prayed. Many of us worry about the decisions we have to make. "Will I decide right? Will things turn out as they should?" Jesus took his burdens and decisions to God. He got on his knees until he knew his Father's will. Only then did he get off his knees to do his ministry. Now, though, he did it secure in knowing what was to be and what was to be done. The first simple guideline our passage gives us this morning is, remember to pray.

The Second simple guideline is this: Pray for others. Much of our passage needs study to unravel. But verse nine needs no deciphering at all: Jesus said, "I am praying for them,..." Prayer for others comes out of the highest motives of human life. If there is one place where human thought and desire can be pure and unselfish, it is in prayer for others.

When we pray for each other we release God's power in each other's life. Sometimes just knowing that someone is praying for us can make the difference for how we face life.

An old Navy man once told me the story of how, in his youth, he had sailed a fishing schooner with his father in the North Atlantic. One night near the Arctic Circle, the dark came down, the fog closed in, and the seas began to run high. "I was at the wheel," he said, "doing my best to keep our craft on course. My father was standing close by. He knew that we were in for a bad night. Then he took out his compass and gazed off for a moment in the direction we both knew marked home. 'Well,' he said, 'about this time the women are offering up their prayers for us to the God who holds the waves in the hollow of his hand.' With that my father's countenance brightened. He seemed to breathe courage into his chest. Then, after a pause, he bellowed to all the crew, 'All hands on deck, put a close reef in the mainsail, and let run the jib. God is with us and wills us home. We have got to get that prayer answered.' I knew then that we would make it. Their prayer was already saving us." Our second simple guideline is, pray for others.

The final simple guideline for this morning is this: to center our prayer in God's will. Prayer can become be a selfish, fearful attempt to get our own way in life; often without regard for the values we profess. Prayers, instead of being about things, can become only for things; which is completely different. We know that God wants us to bring all our concerns and needs and even wants to God. We are to be open and frank in asking for all these things. But these are not meant to be

brought as a shopping list for God to fill. Yes, God wants us to have all we need. But, most often, God wants to help us sort these lists, advise us and direct us and help us to grow up into full maturity in the process.

Growing into real maturity means recognizing that we need to grow and become more than we are; that we need interior change. First and foremost, we are to pray about those things that will change us; our spiritual needs. What are those spiritual needs, those things that we all need to happen in us?

Here's the list: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That list, by the way, comes from Galatians 5:22. It's worth memorizing that verse. If you don't already have it memorized then please take that reference down, then take it to heart. That's Galatians 5:22. This is one shopping list that will always get God's approval and action in our lives. This is putting our lives into God's will.

We hear it in the prayer of Jesus. "I have sought to do your will. These you have given me are yours. Keep them in you. Keep them in your will." Jesus was constant in his desire to be in the will of his Father. If we go to the Lord with only a wish list for things, we can get caught up wondering why nothing is happening, why we aren't growing, changing, getting what we need. If, on the other hand, we center our prayers in God's will, pouring out our worldly needs to be sure, but seeking first our spiritual needs, then change will happen, and needs will be met.

These are the simple guidelines for prayer from our Gospel lesson this morning: first, remember to pray, second, pray for others, and third, center your prayer in God's will that you become fully the person Jesus calls you to be. These are the prayers that will be heard and answered, because Jesus is praying for you.