

First Trinity Lutheran Church  
Seventh Sunday in Easter  
May 5, 2008  
John 17, 1-11

### Jesus Prays for You

One of the most encouraging experiences as a Christian is to be prayed for by someone else – and not only prayed for but prayed with. When someone prays for you in your presence, something special happens in your heart: you feel warmed and encouraged. There's a sense of intimacy, both between you and the other person and between you and God. It's like you're knocking on heaven's doors together. It is one of the best ways to build relationships between people. It's pretty hard for division to exist and take hold when people are praying together. Have you had that experience?

It is one thing for us to pray for and with one another – to bring our brothers and sisters in Christ before the Lord in prayer – but it is quite another to realize that in Jesus we have someone interceding on our behalf. Do you know that Jesus prays for you? Do you know that he goes to the Father on your behalf?

Our text from John chapter 17 recounts, Jesus' final moments with his disciples before being arrested, Jesus prays for his disciples. Knowing that he will be leaving them, praying for them is the best way to prepare them. Jesus prays for three things on our behalf: protection, sanctification, and oneness.

The early Native Indians had a unique practice of training young men. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after learning hunting, scouting, and fishing skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then, he had never been away from the security of the family and the tribe. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of a thick woods and he was terrified! Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce on him. After what seemed like an eternity, dawn broke and the first

rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long.

Jesus' first prayer for us is a prayer for protection. Of course, unlike that young boy, we have the benefit of knowing in advance that God our Father is there to protect us; although just like the young boy, we don't always see our Father guarding us. Jesus asks the Father to "protect" us. He prays, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." The word protect can also translated as "guard," and this is a helpful way of seeing it, especially when we think of that father watching over his son while the son was in the woods and thought he was alone.

Against what are we being protected? Jesus asks that we receive protection from the evil one, that we would be protected when faced with temptation, opposition, persecution, etc. Jesus knows that we will face such things. But he doesn't ask that we be removed from these things. As Jesus says, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world." But while we are in the world, he wants us to be protected and guarded.

Jesus' second prayer for us is a prayer for sanctification. Sanctification here means "to be made holy," and being made holy means being set apart. We are in the world, but we do not, as Jesus says, "belong to the world." Being holy, sanctified, and consecrated means that we belong to God and that He has set us apart for a purpose.

"Sanctification is not about living a clean or perfect life, but living an obedient life. The attraction of the world, the weakness of the flesh, and the onslaught of the devil are daily battles. In the Old Testament it usually conveyed the idea of making something sacred, usually by the burning of the sacrifice. So sanctification is not about avoiding or escaping the world

but yielding and surrendering to God.

Jesus' third prayer for us is a prayer for unity. What does it mean to have unity here? It doesn't mean that we agree on every single point of doctrine. It doesn't mean that there is only one denomination. But it does mean that we are united in confessing that Jesus is the Son of God. It means that we confess in a united way that the Father and the Son are one and that the Father sent the Son into the world and reveals who the Father is.

The importance of oneness and unity is emphasized over and over again in our passage: "Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one (v. 11)." "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one (v. 20)." "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one (v. 22, 23)."

Just as Jesus' sole purpose and mission was to be set apart for God's work in the world, so the disciples are to be set apart, sanctified, and made holy, for God's work in the world. Jesus was able to do this because the Father loved him and he loved the Father; they are one. Our witness of God's work is based in the love Jesus has revealed to us. This love becomes evidence to a godless world that Jesus was sent by the Father. In other words, only by loving one another can we hope to be an effective witness in the world. And that is what we are called to be a witness. Jesus' prayer for us is not so that we will simply be protected until he returns, but that we also are sent just as he was sent. We have a mission, a share in his mission, and only through the unity of love can we live out this mission.

Unity is crucial to witness and mission is that in a world defined by conflict, broken relationships, dysfunctional families, and fractured and nearly non-existent communities, such unity would indeed be a sign that God is at work because no human effort could accomplish it. The love that we are to show the world is to mirror the love the Son shows us; that is to say,

that our love for one another has to be a costly love, a sacrificial love, where we are willing to lay down our lives for one another just as Jesus did for all of us.

Finally it is very important that we recognize that this passage is a prayer. Jesus is asking his Father to accomplish all these things. He is asking his Father to protect us. He is asking his Father to sanctify us. He is asking his Father to make us one in heart and mind. These are not things we can accomplish. We cannot preserve ourselves. We cannot sanctify ourselves. And we certainly cannot make ourselves one and create unity amongst ourselves. Jesus entrusts his disciples to God the Father, and we should entrust ourselves to God the Father.

All of what Jesus asks of his Father here can be summed up in what he says at the end of his prayer: “I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. This is Jesus Prayer for you and for me. Amen.