



Seventh Sunday of Easter (also Mother's Day), May 13, 2018

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*"Like A Good Mother"*

John 17:6-19

## INTRODUCTION

After God raised Jesus from the dead, his disciples had some bonus time with him – forty days to learn even more from him about the meaning of his ministry and the good news of God's rule. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day, Jesus ascended into heaven, and the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As the church, we mark these same events across the yearly calendar. Easter was April 1, and last Thursday was Ascension Day. Next Sunday will be fifty days after Easter, which is why we call it *Pentecost Sunday*, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit.

On these seven Sundays of Easter the suggested scripture readings often include a text from the gospel of John. Why do you think the church does this?

Could it be that once Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples keenly felt his absence, and as they made their way in the world, they intentionally revisited his words? Wouldn't doing so when they were in worship, as with us, keep them grounded and going forward together?

Well, today, the reading from the gospel of John is a segment of the long "pastoral prayer" Jesus offered at the Last Supper. We read it so we, too, can make our way in the world and carry on his mission.

## THE READING

### JESUS PRAYED:

<sup>6</sup> "I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup> This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

<sup>9</sup> "I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup> Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> I'm no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I'm coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one. <sup>12</sup> When I was with them, I watched over them in your name, the name you gave to me, and I kept them safe. None of them were lost, except the one who was destined for destruction, so that scripture would be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> Now I'm coming to you and I say these things while I'm in the world so that they can share completely in my joy.<sup>14</sup> I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world.

<sup>15</sup> I'm not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. <sup>17</sup> Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth.

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## SERMON

Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli sing a celebrated duet that you may have heard, entitled "The Prayer." Well, Dion recorded a second version called "A Mother's Prayer:" *I pray you'll be my eyes, and watch her where she goes, and help her to be wise; help me to let go...I pray she finds your light and holds it in her heart. As darkness falls each night, remind her where you are. Every mother's prayer every child knows: lead her to a place, guide her with your grace to a place where she'll be safe.*

I notice in this prayer of Jesus recorded in the gospel of John that Jesus sounds very much like a good mother. The words and phrases of his prayer are identical to those that parents often utter to God: *I'm praying for those you gave me...watch over them...may they be one [and] share in my joy...keep them safe...make them holy in the truth.* This is a pastoral prayer that Jesus offered in the context of what became his last supper with the disciples. He was going to be arrested and he pleads with God for the disciples as they face his coming absence. It is a prayer that exhibits his *maternal* instincts.

In these verses, like a good mother, Jesus is praying for his children in the faith because he's sending them into the world. He's like those parents who, unbeknownst to their kids, hang back discreetly, yet follow them on their walk on the first day of school – watching over them. Or like us, when our son, Nathan, was in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and

he took his first solo plane trip from Seattle to Florida to visit family. I recall how Steve and I stood at the air terminal window, tensely, prayerfully, following the plane with our eyes, from taxi to take off, across the sky (what were we going to do if something happened?) until it entered a bank of clouds and we could no longer make it out!

The Greek word for "world" in John's gospel is "kosmos," and he regards the world as basically a bad place, full of trouble, and set against God. While God *loves* the world, according to John 3:16, it is a crazy, chaotic, kosmos. So during this prayer, John doesn't imagine Jesus thinking of skies of blue and people saying, "I love you." This is not Louie Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World!" He is not thinking about the heroes who save others or the sane ones who try to lead change, but about volcanoes, gun violence, political threats, heartache, and the danger the disciples will face.

In this context, Jesus is definitely begging God to protect his followers, but he knows that realistically, they'll never get through this life without loss and struggle. He knows that good mothering is *not* smothering. It's not *over-protective*. Jesus, here, is no "helicopter parent."

No, Jesus' prayer is a deeper and more mature, maternal prayer. Jesus is praying for their unity in the midst of their diversity, not their uniformity in avoiding conflict! Jesus is pleading with God to help the church experience true joy where there is no evidence of it! **What Jesus is *really* asking God is that his friends be able to share in and with each other the spiritual intimacy that *he* enjoys with God – the divine presence in *all* circumstances!**

It's been almost exactly three years since my mother-in-law, Margaret Vandergrift, died. Steve kept her last voicemail on his phone and periodically plays it to hear her voice saying: "Good Morning...Just calling to see how you are today...We'll talk again soon."

And isn't *this* why the church picks up the Bible and returns to John 17? So we can listen to Jesus' voice praying for us, sense his presence anew, and remember that **like a good mother, Christ is there, holding us together as we go into the world on his mission?**

So Jesus praying for us means that during this wonderful season of graduations, confirmations, weddings, and baptisms when not only our kids, but *all* of us go into the world on new adventures, *we are not alone*. He and others are praying for us and holding us close in God. One, together, going forward.

It also means that during this new season of TriCon's transition, as you come to the point of decision on the Senior Minister, as the Body of Christ *you are not alone*. He and others are praying for you and holding you close in the Spirit. One, together, going forward in service and mission.

*O God, lead us to this place, guide us with your grace! Amen.*