

JESUS PRAYED FOR YOU

Text: John 17:1-5, 13-26

LHUMC 9-8-13

Does Your Church Have a Prayer? #1

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever overheard someone praying for you? Even when you haven't asked for it? It can be a powerful experience when you realize that someone cares enough about you to pray for you on their own initiative.
- B. Have you ever overheard Jesus praying for you? Well, believe it or not, you just did! And my guess is that none of us have ever been presumptuous enough to ask Jesus to pray for us.
- C. And neither were those first disciples.
 - 1. In its original form that we just heard, this is also an unsolicited prayer that Jesus prays to his Father on behalf of the disciples. They didn't ask for it—they certainly needed it, but they didn't ask for it.
 - 2. This prayer happens immediately after the Last Supper, where the disciples have not only eaten with Jesus, but in John's gospel, he has also washed their feet.
 - 3. And now as the dishes are cleared away and they sit around the table, Jesus launches into a long after-dinner speech often called his Farewell Discourse that ends with this great prayer for the disciples.
- D. And what is clear about this prayer is its timeless quality.
 - 1. In other words, you don't have to be a Biblical scholar to figure out that when Jesus prays for his disciples, it not just that original group that he has in mind.
 - 2. That when he says he is praying for "them", that we are included in the "them".
 - 3. As one commentator says "Jesus wasn't just praying for them, but for all of us them".
 - 4. And beyond that, this is a plural prayer—it's not just about me, it's actually more about us—the church, our church, is the "them" for whom Jesus prays this morning.
- E. One other thing that is clear from this prayer has to do with the timeless quality of the setting in which it is prayed and what is going on in the lives of those first disciples for whom Jesus was praying.
 - 1. We can hardly imagine the stress and anxiety that those disciples were under.
 - 2. As Jesus begins this prayer, he has just been telling them that he was soon to be leaving them, and that it was up to them to continue his work in the world.
 - 3. So to say that their world was being rocked would be an understatement.
 - 4. And it is clear that they don't fully understand what was going to happen to him and to them--all they knew for sure was their anxiety as they faced a great unknown.
 - 5. And so this prayer becomes one for all of us, as individuals and as a church, anytime we face the inevitable anxiety that comes with change.

6. As we look into the future as a church, none of us really know where God is calling to go and to be in the months and years to come, and that can be more than a little stressful.
7. All we know for sure is that we too are called to continue the work of Jesus in the world in our own time and place.
8. And so this prayer becomes our prayer, as Jesus prays for us as he sends us off into the future that only he knows.
9. And so how comforting it is know that Jesus prays for us as we embark on what our book calls this journey into the Promised Land.

II. The book also speaks to the reality that within this prayer, Jesus lays out both his vision and his mission for us as his church. So let me unpack a little what that means and what the elements of Jesus vision and mission for us are as identified in the prayer. First, the vision:

A. It begins with “sanctification”. Some explanation of what that is:

1. What it literally means is to “become more saintly”. Anyone here today wish you could become more saintly? Wouldn’t it be cool to be a part of a church that was on the path to becoming more saintly?
2. The good news is that like so many of the gifts God gives us, the gift of sanctification is offered to each of us and to our church free of charge.
3. God’s greatest desire for each of us and for this community of faith is that we become more saintly, so God offers us what we need to get there, whether it is worship, or Bible study, or mission opportunities, etc.
4. And Jesus is the greatest example of what God gave us to be more saintly, as Jesus reminds us when he says that he was sanctified so that we might be sanctified in the truth, his truth, as we go out into the world.
5. So all of that is the good news.
6. The not-so-good news is that so often we imperfect, unsaintly human beings fail to reach out and take hold of and open the gift.
7. Instead of growing in the truth of Christ, because of fear, because of peer pressure, because of our need for security, we get wrapped up in the different kind of truth that the world offers us, a truth that is often very different from the truth of love and hope and forgiveness that Jesus offers.
8. And so Jesus prays that we might be “in the world and not of the world”—recognizing that we can’t stay here in this holy place 24/7, but as we go out there, we continue to grow and share his truth as a part of our ongoing sanctification.

B. And then he talks about joy as a part of his vision for us.

1. The whole notion of joy must have sounded particularly absurd to those first disciples.
2. You can almost hear them saying, “Okay, Jesus, you just told us that you are going to suffer and die, and we are supposed to then go out and take over your job. And now you think we are supposed to “experience your joy” in everything that we do. Are you kidding me?”

3. But Jesus is clear—they (and we) are to go out into the world with the same kind of joy that Jesus had as he went out into the world—a joy that sustained him to the very end of his earthly life.

C. And then the other part of Jesus vision is one of unity.

1. And this goes way beyond what we think of when we think of “Christian unity”.
2. This is more than planning community worship services or working together with other folks from other churches at MAP or in a Crop Walk.
3. Or as one of my teachers used to say about this prayer, “This is more than holding hands around the campfire and singing Kum-ba-yah.”
4. Jesus prays that we might have the same unity as he has with his Father.
5. So ponder that for a minute...it says in scripture that Jesus is one his Father, that they are literally of the same eternal substance, and so Jesus prays that we are to have the same kind of unity with each other, that we are to be of the “same substance”, and that substance, Jesus says, is the glory that he gives us.
6. We are to be unified through the glory of Christ, working in us and through us and working in this place called Lake Harbor.
7. So that is the theological reality of the unity that is a part of Jesus’ vision for us in the prayer.
8. But beyond all that theological talk, what that means is that on any journey to God’s Promised Land, we all have to be on the same page and going in the same direction, or we’ll never get there.
9. Just read Exodus sometime if you don’t believe that—that original story of a people on a journey to their own Promised Land that wasn’t a smooth one until they figured that out.
10. Until they did, they were bogged down by grumbling and whining and fear and idol worship and all the rest.

III. So sanctification (growing more saintly), joy, and unity—that is the vision that Jesus prays that we might have. Then comes the mission, which is how we live out the vision. The mission is where the rubber hits the road, where vision becomes action. Vision without mission is kind of like coming up with a fantastic recipe for chocolate chip cookies and then never making any. How does this prayer convey God’s mission for us?

- A. What is clear first and foremost, and what we will keep coming back to throughout this study is that our mission as individuals and as a church is always to focus on people and issues beyond ourselves.
- B. And today’s chapter centers specifically on the three things that Jesus focuses on in the prayer:
 1. That we are to glorify God through our faith in Christ.
 - a) In other words, any time we serve others in the name of Christ, it’s not about us.
 - b) It’s not about building our resumes or making us feel good about ourselves, it’s about glorifying God.

- c) As the book says, glorifying God is the one purpose not just for what we do in ministry, but what we do with our lives.
 - d) Everything we do, whether it's at church, at work, at school, or anywhere else we find ourselves, is about God's glory and not our own.
2. Understand our call as people who are sent into the world.
- a) The truth is, unless we figure out our call as individuals and as a church where God wants us to be and what God wants us to do, it's hard to fully live out God's vision.
 - b) It's not that we don't do good things, it's just easy sometimes for me to do my thing over here, and you do your thing over there, etc. and even though we get some things done for God, it's less in the big picture than if we fully understood God's call for us within this community of faith and work together on that common call that God has for our church.
 - c) A big part of the Vital Church Initiative that you've been hearing about, and which this study is a part of, is figuring out what call that God might have for our church and then figuring out how to be in mission together to bring it about.
3. Making God's love known through Jesus
- a) In other words, it's all about love.
 - b) I was reading a paper written by a candidate for ministry the other day and in it, she wrote that when you boil it all down, the purpose of the church is to live out God's great commandment, which is to love others as God has loved us.
 - c) And I realized she hit the nail right on the head—this is what Jesus is praying for us when he says to God, “I have made your very being known to them—Who you are and what you do—and continue to make it known, so that your love for me might be in them exactly as I am in them.”
 - d) And notice he says that he continues that work—even today, even to us, reminding us how much God loves us so that we might share that love with others.
 - e) What better mission could any church have than to love others as God loves us?

IV. Conclusion

- A. And so we have overheard Jesus pray for us today. If that doesn't get your juices flowing and your spirit energized, I'm not sure what will!
- B. We have heard him say to us that while he is no longer physically present in the world, we are.
- C. As he says, as the church, we are now his body in the world, and have been given his vision to be lived out in his mission.
- D. This great prayer always reminds me of the words of St. Theresa of Avila who said, “Christ has no body on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours; ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out on a hurting world, ours are the feet which he goes about doing good, ours are the hands with which he is to bless others.”

- E. Next week here in worship we will be looking at both chapters two and three of the book which use a wonderful Biblical story as a starting point to examine those attitudes and obstacles that can keep us from living out God's mission in the world.
- F. If you are like me, you will no doubt see yourself somewhere in that story, and that's okay.
- G. Because to overcome obstacles, often the first thing we have to do is to recognize them as such! And those chapters can help us in that effort.
- H. (Do questionnaire)