

5-15-22

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Pastor Prieue

Text: John 17:20-26

Theme: Jesus Prays for You!

In the Old Testament, when God set aside the priesthood to serve him and the people in the Tabernacle, he gave specific instructions about the garments that the priests were to wear, especially the High Priest. The skilled workers from among the people were to make sacred garments for the priests. **“These are the garments they are to make; a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash.” (Exodus 28:4).** (On the screen is a picture of what each of those might have looked like).

For the breastpiece, they were to make it out of expensive gold and blue and purple yarn, and then they were to mount on it four rows of three precious stones, twelve in all, with the names of each of the twelve tribes of Israel. **“Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the LORD.” (Exodus 28:29).** What beautiful symbolism God attached to this breastpiece, that the High Priest was to bear his people on his heart, and consider them in whatever way he was serving them or making decisions for them according to God’s direction.

All of these special symbols, like the priestly breastpiece, and the tabernacle, and the ark of the covenant, which God had command in Old Testament worship life had specific purposes in pointing ahead. The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians, **“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:17).** Today, as we consider our text from last section of John 17, we see one of those shadows, the high priestly breastpiece, turn into its reality in Christ.

This chapter of the Bible is often called Jesus’ High Priestly prayer, because here we see Jesus bearing his people on his heart as he lifts them up in prayer to his Father. Don’t skip over that too quickly! **JESUS PRAYS FOR YOU!** If you’re like me, you might have all kinds of trouble forgetting to pray to Jesus, but what a comfort it is to know he doesn’t forget about you. **Jesus prays for you,** and even on the most tumultuous night of his life.

Today, though we’re over halfway through the Easter season, we step back in the timeline, to the night Jesus was betrayed. That night Jesus had been instructing his disciples. He gave them the Lord’s Supper, he washed their feet and commanded them to love one another. The last thing he did with them before he led them through the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives was lift his eyes toward heaven and offer up a prayer to his Father—for himself, for his disciples, and **not for them alone, but for all who will believe in me through their message.** (John 17:20). That includes you and me, who believe in him!

And Oh, was it a closing prayer for the ages. Still to this day, the task of saying the closing prayer often remains one of the pastor’s duties. I can still remember the first church meeting I attended as a vicar, (a pastor-in-training), when my overseeing pastor gave a little smirk as he spontaneously announced at the end of the meeting that Vicar would lead the closing prayer. The pressure was on, my palms began to sweat, my mind went blank, and a pretty soon I had prayed myself into a corner where the only escape was to say, “In Jesus name we pray, Amen!”

Not the case for Jesus and this prayer, his High Priestly prayer. One of the Lutheran Reformers, Philipp Melanchthon, the guy who wrote the Augsburg Confession, the foundational confession of the Lutheran Church, said about this prayer, **“No worthier, no holier, no more blessed or exalted voice has ever been heard in heaven or on earth than this petition of the Son of God himself.”** (qtd. in *The Gospels*. Ylvisaker, John. 687).

So when Jesus prays for you, what does he pray for? First, he prays for unity. He says, **“I pray... 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—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.”** (John 17:21-23a).

Jesus wants you to be as tightly knit and united to him and to each other as he is to his Father in the indivisible Trinity! Even though we can't possibly comprehend all the depths of the unity and inner workings of Triune God, try to imagine for a second what that was like before the world was ever created. No people, no sin. From eternity, it was only Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in perfect unity, expressing nothing but love, harmony and peace. And Jesus gives us a glimpse of the love that the Father had for him even before the creation of the world. That's the perfect love and unity that Jesus prays for us to share in- complete unity with the Trinity!

If you've ever thought to yourself or heard someone else say something like, “Jesus is irrelevant! Maybe he had some good things to say about things long ago, but now it's all outdated...” That's about the farthest thing from the truth, because I would submit to you that division and disunity and the resentment that it brings is just about the most pressing issue on the American table today. We've seen again in the last week or so how explosive this resentment can be as the issue of Roe vs Wade has risen to the top, and before that it was how to handle vaccines, and before that how to handle Covid 19, masks, and before that an endless chain of issues that have divided everybody about everything, and almost hopelessly so!

Does it really come as any surprise when you have such wide array of people, from diverse cultures and backgrounds living in different contexts and environments, all with sinful natures that are essentially looking out for number 1. The diversity and polarization of our world in political, and social, and racial and even biblical issues can serve as a breeding ground for anger, and hatred and resentment. You and I are by no means immune. Any of those issues can get under my skin, and make me angry and frustrated, and resentful, and want to lash out and argue and put people down. Any one of those things can form a divide that isolates me from anyone who thinks differently than me in my family or my church or my workplace.

But when that happens, we don't win. The devil wins. He divides and he conquers, and you and I end up alone, and angry and resentful, unless someone does something about it. And the only person who could do something about it is the one who made it his dying wish, his fervent plea, and his life's work to bring us back to himself and unite us with each other once again in complete and perfect unity. That's the second thing Jesus prayed for—for you to be with him in glory! Our Great High Priest prayed, **“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.”

Jesus doesn't want you sitting for all eternity angry and isolated from God and other people. He wants you with him where he is, sharing his glory and basking in his Father's love, and enjoying the company of his holy saints. That's what our Great High Priest Jesus had on his heart the night before he died. You! Your wellbeing, your safety, your connection to the Father. That's the whole reason he came, to make his Father's love known to the earth. **“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).**

These words are not just the pious platitudes of somebody trying to garner some votes. These words are the last will and testament of our High Priest signed in blood. See not just what he said, but what he did about it! The writer to the Hebrews tells us, **“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.** (Hebrews 2:10). So Jesus not only prayed for us and our wellbeing but he endured the cross in order to deliver us into his glory, so that we would be where he is, and share in his Father's love. Our Great High Priest held us on his heart that evening so that he could hold us in his arms for eternity.

There's just one more thing to remember. It was the last thing Jesus prayed, **that you would help to make known the Father's love for the world.** All of this effort that Jesus expends in prayer and in suffering and in dying, it's not for you alone. It's for all who would believe the message, people with different backgrounds and preferences, different cultures or and skin colors, people with lots of money and people with no money.

In Revelation 22, our second lessons for today, the Apostle John paints a beautiful picture, we might even say a mosaic, of what heaven will look like. It's filled with people from every tribe and language and nation, and this they have in common. Their robes are all washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They're streaming through the gates of the Holy City where they, together with all believers in Christ, get the right to eat from the tree of life and drink from the water of life. There they'll live at last, one with God and each other forever, the Holy Christian Church, the true communion or community of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

This is the picture Jesus wants us to show to our dying world, sinners of every stripe washed in the blood of Christ. When even for a glimpse, for brief moments, we are able to come together as one with God and each other in the way we live and move and have our being—in complete unity, guided by the Word of God. Jesus says, **“Then the world will know that you, [Father] sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”** (John 17:23). Then in Christ, we begin to see **unity marching victorious in diversity** until that day when we see it forever. Lord Jesus, let your good will and your fervent prayer be done for us now on earth and forever in heaven. Amen.