

Sunday, May 13, 2018 – Seventh Sunday of Easter/Full of Faith VII/Mother's Day
“Praying for You”

John 17: 11b-19

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Story Applied

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

And blessings to all the ladies here today, whether you are a mother of children living or bereaved, an aunt, godmother or lady with a purpose to make a difference in the lives of others as a disciple of Jesus – whatever your lot in life, God's blessings to you all on this day.

We near the end of the Easter season – as well as the end of our Full of Faith series on this deeply moving prayer by Jesus to the Father. These are words Jesus prays aloud with His disciples around in in that same Upper Room where earlier he had shown them what it looks like to serve others in love through washing their feet, where He celebrated the Passover and did something new, giving them His body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of their sins. As He finishes this prayer the disciples will leave and cross the Kidron Valley to an olive grove with a Garden called Gethsemane, where he will be arrested and before the next sundown, he will be dead and buried in a tomb.

But you know, something funny about this prayer – Jesus prays, out loud, for His disciples to overhear, that they may be one. And Jesus knows full well what's about to happen next – when He is arrested the disciples will scatter. Judas betrays, Peter denies, Thomas is skeptical, John runs away naked, his cloak ripped away and in the grasp of a soldier trying to apprehend him, all are locked away and afraid for fear of those who might do the same to them as has been done to Jesus. This oneness that Jesus prays for isn't very in this scene, is it?

We see those fractures in our relationships as well. And we could talk about what that looks like between Christian denominations, or little rifts that can form in congregations, which is probably the most direct application of Jesus' words, that we all be one, but with today being Mother's Day, I'm going to focus instead on family units because the truth is that what Jesus speaks in this beautiful prayer may more often resemble something like what happened with Jesus' disciples within hours of this prayer. Tell me if you've ever seen any of the following in families... in your family: betrayal, denial, disbelief, running away and hiding away, locking away our hearts to stay invulnerable and afraid to trust. Yeah... me too.

It's tempting to lose hope, when selfishness and evil rule the day, when panic sets in, when we want to protect ourselves from being hurt yet again. And that very reflex toward protection and self-preservation destroys the oneness for which Jesus prays.

The typical reaction of a convicted disciple yearning for that connection is one of two things: double down on trying that much harder to be faithful to trust God and His promises, or despair and being overwhelmed at a hopeless cause. I could try and compel you to cheer up, push forward, try harder, do as you'd have others do to you, and right as all those things might be, you'd keep setting yourself up for more pain at the hands of others, more panic in the face of great danger, more walls up to protect yourself from the pain that comes with intimacy with imperfect people. I could compel you, disciple of Jesus, but then I hear once more Jesus' words in this prayer.

He prays for us to be one, as He is with His Father in Heaven. He mentions how He protected His disciples, and now He commends them to the Father's protection as they go out into the world. He prays that they be protected, made holy through God's Word of truth, even as they are sent out into the world to love their neighbor and share the good news.

Disciples of Jesus sent out on God's mission, hear this: the act of making you one with God or with each other is God's activity. It's only His protection and activity that can bind us as one around His saving Word. And what does the Word of God do? It forgives us, it claims us in that name – remember, protected by the power of the name, Jesus prays – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It mysteriously forgives and unites and makes holy betrayers and denial experts, skeptics and runners and hiders who build up walls and are afraid to trust. Jesus' prayer, while overheard by His disciples is not some manipulative, indirect command. You know, like Jesus is praying but what he's saying is really intended for the benefit of telling the disciples what they'd really better be getting on about... no, that's not happening here. This is a sincere prayer from the heart of the Savior to the Father in Heaven for our forgiveness. For protecting us from temptation to our fallback positions like betrayal and denial and skepticism and running and hiding. For protection from the evil one. It's an ask of God for His rule and His plan to happen through us so that we, just like Jesus with His Father, would be able to come to our Father in Heaven full of joy and hope. And you know what? The Father will do these things, exactly as

Jesus asks it, because His blood given for you and me makes us holy and protects us under God's holy name. In fact our Father is so committed to that promise and plan to protect you in the middle of your messy discipleship that on the cross He destroyed the perfect oneness with His Son – an epic, divine family explosion by the sacrifice of Jesus to make us holy. He rejected oneness with His Son on the cross to have oneness with you and me. Such great cost confirms God's great commitment to protect and make you and me holy by His Word of truth. It makes no sense, unless we view it with firm conviction to restore unity, oneness and real love once more.

It's that very conviction of God to restore love that then changes the lives of disciples of Jesus between each other – including in our families. A couple of weeks ago at Confirmation one of our young people, Sam, shared of the impact of his father Tom on his faith. Tom was diagnosed with cancer, and Sam spoke of the example of his dad's joy that came out of knowing God's promises to him were true was an encouragement to him. That's where the rubber hits the road with this stuff, real life, messy, messed up world full of things ready to bring out the worst in us – but when we're made holy, sanctified around God's truth it protects us and unites us as one. And you know the crazy thing is, Tom didn't even know he was doing this for his son. I was at lunch with the family after Confirmation and Tom shared that he'd never known Sam was impacted in that way and got that witness to God's love out of it.

Being a disciple of Jesus in your family life will be a lot like that. There are plenty of very intentional things that you try to do to love your spouse, your kids, your parents well. There are disagreements and painful moments of self-realization. The temptation will be to betray or go into denial, to fight against it, to run or to hide. Remember this, disciple of Jesus – Jesus prays for YOU. He prayed for His disciples who were about to betray, deny, disbelieve run and hide right before He knew they were about to do those very things. He prayed for you and me explicitly in verses 20-26, right after our text, and He keeps on praying for us, that we may be one just as Jesus and His Father are one. Intentionally seeking after God's will as disciples of Jesus, that's good but the best comes in what Jesus prays for, where God's Word offers protection in a challenging world. And maybe, like Sam and Tom, the greatest impact will be not in the intentional things that you do but in the things God does through you about which you have no awareness at all. Thanks be to God! In Jesus' name, Amen.