

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Saint Dunstons Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
1 June 2025

John 17:20-26

The priestly prayer of Jesus of Nazareth today in John reminds me of the phrase made famous by Ethan Hunt in the Mission Impossible franchise. He says, “We live and die in the shadows, for those we hold close, and for those we never meet.” Jesus today prays for those who will come centuries later. “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.” He knows he will be dying for those he holds close, and for those he will never meet in person in the same way he has met his disciples and his family. Jesus knows that decisions made today, in the twenty-first century, or in any century, are the building blocks for a future reality neither you nor I can see at this very moment. Decades after we are gone, Christians will gather in these buildings to worship the same Lord, to share their life in community, to rejoice in the Gospel of Salvation, and to cry their tears of pain and their tears of joy to the empathic God who loves them and cares for them. What we do today sets the stage for the future.

He is in the upper room at his last supper with his friends. This has been a long meal, filled with symbolic gestures like the washing of feet, and filled with important lessons about the church he has founded and what they can expect in the future. At some point, the teaching stops, the symbolic actions end, the meal is over, all that remains is a final prayer of farewell. After this prayer, he will be arrested, and he will never have another conversation with his friends until after his resurrection. So, he looks up to heaven and prays, “that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” The unity of the Church is of utmost importance to him. Not just the unity of those gathered around that humble table in Jerusalem, but also the unity of the billions of Christians who will come to believe in him because of the Apostles teaching. This unity is important to Christ because of what it says about the nature of Jesus’ identity and mission for the world. This unity has a purpose, that the world may know that Christ is the one sent by the Father for the salvation of the world, and that knowing this truth, the world may realize how

much God has loved them. I have taught that unity of purpose and love of neighbor attract the nonbelievers to Christ, while our disunity and Church-fighting repels the world from Christ.

I love the fact that Jesus sees his upcoming ultimate sacrifice on the cross as a gift for those who will become his disciples in the future. His ultimate act of sacrificial giving will bring the world to God in countless generations to come. His crucifixion and resurrection are good news in 825, 1525, 1925, 2025, and thousands of years later. Jesus sees himself as a gift God has given the world, and he sees his disciples as a gift God has given him. What this means is that the disciples are called to be a gift that blesses the world. Christ is the gift that keeps on giving life to the world in every generation. And this possible because we, his disciples, have shown the world a better way for centuries. It is our job to bring this gift God has giving the world to all the corners of the world.

In many ways, what churches do in this generation is a gift for “those we hold close, and for those we will never meet.” I see the job of every Rector as the stewardship of three different congregations. We must pay homage to the church in generations past. We must honor their sacrifice and their faithfulness. They made many sacrifices to ensure that the Gospel of salvation would be preached on this place for generations to come. We steward their legacy by proclaiming the Gospel, by taking care of the buildings and grounds they have left us, by making sure we meet the challenges of our community with hope and faith, by growing and becoming vibrant for many generations.

I am also the Rector of an existing congregation, and you all are stewards of the congregation we have today. The church of today requires our prayers, our pastoral care, our fellowship, our Christian formation, our outreach, and our undivided attention to the needs of our parishioners, both young and old alike. This is our church as it stands today, with all its challenges and incredible potential. The decisions we make today will greatly affect and determine our future tomorrows. We must live fully the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth in our own context, becoming a spiritual and physical refuge for those in need of a merciful and compassionate God. Our union and love for each other and our community will create a legacy that will grow this church and make it vibrant and viable for the future.

I also see myself as a steward of the church to come. We must today pledge to ensure the future viability of our church for generations to come. Many of our children's children will sit on those same pews, will be fed from this same table, will listen to the Gospel of salvation preached from this pulpit, and will develop life-long friends who will accompany them as they journey through life. We have a responsibility to these who will come after us. We must leave a legacy for them. The work we will do over the next year will make this campus a welcoming place for us and for them. We will build a kitchen for cooks who are just infants today. We will create a new entrance for parishioners who haven't even thought about moving to Houston yet. We will restore this sanctuary for our infant children and grandchildren because even if they walkway from church for a season, many of them will eventually return to raise their children among us. We need to think very carefully and to pray for those who will come to believe because of the work we do today. We must honor our past, we must live our faith fully today, and we need to get ready for what God will do for us ten, twenty, and thirty years from now.

Today, we will bless and consecrate all the pledges received so far for our "Deep Roots, Building the Future" Campaign. But there is still time for those who haven't pledged. We need everyone to participate in this campaign with radical generosity. God has blessed us abundantly and it is time for us to participate actively in what God is doing among us.

Please know that I am praying for all of you. God has blessed us that we may be a blessing to others, and I know personally that the greatest blessings always come to the givers and the faithful.

May our Lord continue to bless you. Amen!