

**7th SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**June 2, 2019**

Text: John 17:20-26

Theme: Jesus Prays for Us

I receive a healthy number of emails every day but one that was sent to me recently came as a total surprise. It read:

Pastor Kessinger – I doubt that you remember us (however) you performed our wedding ceremony on December 20, 2012. I wanted to reach out and say hello, wish you well, and let you know that we have recently prayed for you. My wife and I are doing well and are still happily married. We both wanted to let you know how much we appreciated you and that we have been thinking about you. God Bless.

I responded immediately to their email and thanked them for holding me in prayer as it truly brightened my day. And I was quick to assure the couple that I remembered them because the circumstances of their wedding were so unique. Not members of the church, they wanted to hold the ceremony at Redeemer on a Thursday because that was the anniversary date for one set of parents. But aside from that, the most interesting part of the wedding was that they were both married once before (to each other). It was the reason the husband included in his message that they were still happily married.

It is humbling to know when people are praying for you for no other reason than out of their Christian love for you. During one Lenten season a friend of mine sent emails to different people each day to let them know they were in her prayers. It left an impression because it was not based on a specific need or concern but was centered on her desire to just let the recipients of the email know they were being thought of and it was powerful.

As we end this Easter season, Jesus sends us a message (not through an email but through the words found in the *Gospel of John*) that he is praying for us. I find that to be even more humbling and powerful! We pray to Jesus all the time but today we can step back and hear his prayer for us. And it is an incredible and beautiful prayer filled with compassion and hope. It is an awesome way to end Easter and anticipate the coming of the Holy Spirit next week on Pentecost!

But first we have to back it up and hear the prayer he offers his closest disciples. Our lesson still puts us on the Thursday that Jesus was betrayed, handed over to his enemies, tried, convicted, and ultimately crucified. He knows what is about to happen to him. So out of his love and compassion for those who have dedicated their lives to him, he gathers them together to offer a prayer to his heavenly Father on their behalf. And in this prayer Jesus did not mention all the different ways his followers failed him. No! He lets his Father know that they were good students and received his teachings and now they know him and believe in him.

From there he makes a passionate plea: While his disciples are still in this world (and as he departs from them) he wants them to be guarded and protected so that they can do the work of the kingdom. Our translation of the text is a bit misleading. Jesus is not so much asking that the disciples be guarded and protected from personal harm and danger (because that is a given in a broken world) as he is asking that they be kept safe from those things that could pull them away from their faith.

Jesus is asking God to help them withstand the constant onslaught by the evil one. Jesus is asking God to give them strength by opening up opportunities for them to work together as one. He wants his beloved disciples to have the kind of tight relationship he has with his Father.

And then he prays not only for them, but for all who believe in him. And this is where we come into the story. Jesus wants God to help us and give us strength as we work together so that the gospel message will keep spreading until the time that he comes again.

When we pray to God our Father we wonder all the time if our prayers will be answered. So has this prayer of Jesus been answered? Some would argue that we are not doing so well combating the evil one as there are always wars and rumors of wars. Others would argue that we are not working well together since the church is divided into all these different faith traditions and denominations.

But I would have to *yes* from the mere fact that we are in church today. We read in the rest of Scripture about the persecution of the early Christians and the struggles of the early church yet the gospel message spread.

We hear about false teachers who alter the teachings of Jesus yet the gospel message has spread. We may not be working well together to the extent possible yet the gospel message is spreading. We sit in church today because someone told us about Jesus. It could have been our parents, teachers, grandparents, a friend, and/or pastor but someone told us about the good news of Jesus Christ. Inspired by his promises and empowered by the Holy Spirit the gospel message has reached us and will continue to be heard.

At the wedding I presided over last weekend the bride held in her hand a small Bible that her mother gave to her which her mother received from the bride's grandmother. Such testimonies take us all the way back to the witness of the first disciples who (despite their fear after the crucifixion and resurrection) nevertheless moved out of the closed room they huddled in for a while and started to share the story of Jesus with other people, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

On this Sunday, thousands of years after this prayer was spoken, we are invited into the story as an active participant. We are to share the unconditional, unbelievable love that God has for the entire world. Our opportunity on this Sunday is to let people know that whatever is going on in their lives, whatever obstacles and challenges they face, they do not walk alone. We walk with them and (as we walk) we tell them the story of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we become the answer to Jesus' prayer.

What we do and what we say and how we say it matters now more than ever. Christ wants us to be one in unity with each other. It is the strongest message we can send to a world that is bombarded by words and actions that counter the love of God. And we can start with each of us choosing one person in our lives that we want to send an email to (or handwritten note to) and let them know that we thought about them and we are praying for them. Let people know about this amazing prayer Jesus offered on our behalf. Be compassionate in your tone and give that person a sense of hope that centers on Christ.

At the end of the day the world will be a more kind and loving place because of that one email or note. Amen