

# Protect Them

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish  
Mother's Day, May 12-13, 2018  
Easter 7

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

John 17:6-19 (NRSV)

*Grace and Peace to you from Christ, who on the night before He was betrayed, arrested, crucified and died, prayed for you. That you have strength and protection. That you be one. Amen.*

## **Move 1: Joke**

Before we dive into the powerful prayer that Jesus lifts up on our behalf, I want to say again, "Happy Mother's Day!" Thank you to all our St. Mark's women who nurture and provide an example of how to live a life of friendship, compassion, and generosity.

My mom is an absolute saint. My wife has carried on that title. I think that's what moms are: saints. Angels sent by God who have the patience, endurance, and strength to help mold our young people. Who somehow put up with all the mess with grace and love.

In light of that, I want to share a story.

Little Patrick was a naughty little boy who, as it happened, wanted a bicycle more than anything else in the world. When he asked his mother for one, she told him that he could have a bike only if he learned to behave himself, which he promptly promised to do.

After a week of trying to behave, little Patrick found it next to impossible. Trying to be helpful, his saint of a mother suggested, "Maybe if you write a little note to Jesus, you'll find it easier to be good."

The little guy agreed to try and, rushing upstairs, he flopped down on his bed, pencil in hand.

*"Dear Jesus, if you let me have a bike, I promise to be good for the rest of my life."*

Realizing that he could never do that, little Patrick crumbled the paper and started anew.

*"Dear Jesus, if you let me have a bike, I promise to be good for a whole month."*

Realizing that was even beyond him, Patrick decided not to start again.

Instead, he ran into his parent's room, went to his mother's dresser, removed her statue of the Holy Mother, closed it in a shoebox, and hid the shoebox under his bed.

Hopping onto his bed, Patrick returned to his pad and pencil.

*"Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother..." [1]*

## **Move 2: Mother's Day Prayer**

Thank you, moms. For all you do. For the things you do that so often go unnoticed. For the countless sacrifices you make for the family. For the unflashy but Godly works you do each and every day. You are an example of love that I strive to be.

But I also want to recognize that, for some, this day isn't one of joy and happiness. For some, this day brings about a lot of despair, pain, and hurt.

It's a reminder for all of us that Christian life always entails both. It entails both happiness and hope, as well as death and despair.

We are both people of this world and of the world yet to come. We experience both the hope of God's Kingdom but also experience the pain in this earthly realm.

Jesus knew this. We hear that in Scripture today. In his prayer. Notice: Jesus didn't pray that we would have an easy, comfortable life. Christ knew this world is and will continue to be captive to sin and evil. He knew the challenges we would face as we continued his

mission. That our love for neighbor would always face opposition. But Jesus doesn't leave us empty-handed or helpless. Jesus has concern for us. He cares. And Jesus prays.

He prays for God, the Father, to protect us. Support us. Give us strength. That we be one. One with each other. One with Christ, as Christ is one with the Father.

That togetherness is what Christ wants for us. That is what helps us carry on, handle and endure what we experience in this life.

Prayer is powerful. We are prayer warriors who are able to endure the *both* in this life. Not because of our ability but because Christ still prays for us. Prayer strengthens us and connects us to the One God.

A friend and colleague of mine posted a Mother's Day prayer that I feel is worth sharing. Please bow your heads and pray with me:

I want you to know I'm praying for you if you are like Tamar, struggling with infertility, or a miscarriage.

I want you to know that I'm praying for you if you are like Rachel, counting the women among your family and friends who year by year and month by month get pregnant, while you wait.

I want you to know I'm praying for you if you are like Naomi, and have known the bitter sting of a child's death.

I want you to know I am praying for you if you are like Joseph and Benjamin, and your Mom has died.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if your relationship with your Mom was marked by trauma, abuse, or abandonment, or she just couldn't parent you the way you needed.

I want you to know I am praying for you if you've been like Moses' mother and put a child up for adoption, trusting another family to love your child into adulthood.

I want you to know I am praying for you if you've been like Pharaoh's daughter, called to love children who are not yours by birth.

I want you to know I am praying for you if you, like many, are watching (or have watched) your mother age, and disappear into the long goodbye of dementia, Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if you, like Mary, are pregnant for the very first time and waiting breathlessly for the miracle of your first child.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if your children have turned away from you, painfully closing the door on relationship, leaving you holding your broken heart in your hands. And like Hagar, now you are mothering alone.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if motherhood is your greatest joy and toughest struggle all rolled into one.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if you are watching your child battle substance abuse, a public legal situation, mental illness, or another situation which you can merely watch unfold.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if you, like so many women before you, do not wish to be a mother, are not married, or in so many other ways do not fit into societal norms.

I want you to know that I am praying for you if you see yourself reflected in all, or none of these stories.

This mother's day, wherever and whoever you are, we walk with you. You are loved. You are seen. You are worthy.

And may you know the deep love without end of our big, wild, beautiful God who is the very best example of a parent that we know. Amen. [2]

This is a prayer written by Amy Young and adapted by Heidi Carrington Heath.

Together, we join in this prayer. To remember and praise our God is present in this life. He is present in all of it. The *both*. He has revealed to us the world yet to come but is still guiding us, showing us, and protecting us in this world.

### **Move 3: Scripture**

We hear that in Jesus' prayer in today's Scripture. We overhear Jesus praying on behalf of his disciples, and his prayer shows Jesus' genuine care and concern for his disciples. In it, he's also preparing his disciples for the challenges they will face as they fulfill their purpose to live out and spread the Gospel.

You see, this prayer takes place as a part of Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus knows he soon will be killed. During the last meal that Jesus has with his disciples, Jesus offers this prayer. The meal started with him washing the disciples' feet, and he ends the meal

with this closing prayer. Directly following this meal and prayer, Judas will betray Jesus in the garden.

Jesus doesn't spend his last moments praying about himself. Praying for nice things. Praying for his wellbeing. He prays for his disciples. For their earthly journey as they seek to bring the Kingdom of God into this broken world.

But Jesus doesn't just pray for those twelve disciples then. He was praying and thinking of all disciples who would carry on and endure this purpose of sharing God's love in the world.

You'll notice that I expanded and read beyond verse 19. It's because I think verses 20-21 are so important and point out that Jesus wasn't just praying for disciples then. He was praying for us now.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through the [their] disciples' word, that they may all be one.

John 16:20-21a (NRSV)

Think about that. Jesus, on his last night, he was thinking and praying for you. For us. For those who would continue in the faith. For those who would continue serving and participating in God's mission.

And he prays for our protection. And that we be one. He prayed it then, and he continues to pray for us today.

During worship, we always recite the Lord's Prayer together. Words Jesus taught us. Words that connect us to God's Kingdom and God's will. Words that unify us. Words that remind us we are a part of something bigger.

Today, we take a moment to reflect on this prayer in John 17. The prayer our Lord and Savior spoke on our behalf. This prayer reminds us of the constant care and concern Jesus has for us. And it reflects the love that God has for all the world. It's a reminder that Jesus still prays for us.

Jesus is still actively bringing us protection, support, and love. He is still drawing us deeper and deeper into relationship with God. He is still doing all of this through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Move 4: Conclusion

So, yes, sometimes this world is messy. Our mothers can all attest to that. But we don't lose faith because we know that Jesus prays for us. We need that. I need that.

I need Jesus. I need his persistent prayers.

We all do as we continue living out the gospel together. We need strength for the road. And we need each other. Christ prayed for both of those for us and continues today.

Because Christ prays for us, we are prepared and ready to step in.

Jesus didn't set us apart from the world. He didn't take us out. He sent us in. To continue His work. To share his abundant love with each other and with the whole broken world. [3]

We do so with confidence—not in ourselves—but in Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, works in and through us. Amen.

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[1] Jeff Rovin. *1,001 Great Jokes*. A Signet Book. Published by New American Library, 1987.

[2] Prayer written by Amy Young. Adapted by Heidi Carrington Heath.

[3] Mark Vitalis Hoffman. "Commentary on John 17:6-19." [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), May 13, 2018.

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