

John 17:20-26 *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ 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.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ 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."*

What is Jesus praying for you?

1. He prays for the unity of the Church
2. He prays for your unity with God
3. He prays that you may experience Jesus' glory

"I'll pray for you." Those are comforting words, aren't they? We take it as a sign of love when someone offers to take the time to pray for us. When a friend, or a relative, or brother or sister in Christ says, "I'll pray for you" we are always thankful for their thoughtfulness.

"I'll pray for you." How would you feel if Jesus said that to you? I know it would sure put a smile on my face! My Savior praying for me sounds pretty awesome. And he does! Did you hear your name when the gospel lesson was read? Jesus was praying for you. Let's listen in to Jesus and hear what he is praying for you.

You might call John 17 "The Other Lord's Prayer." This is Jesus' prayer that he prayed on after the Last Supper and the institution of the Lord's Supper and before he was arrested in Gethsemane. In this midst of teaching his disciples Jesus paused to pray. He prayed first for himself, then for his disciples and finally, in our text, he prays for the whole Church – you and me.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ 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. Jesus prayed for Christian unity. That is something you possess right now. Because we live in a sinful world, we do not always clearly see or appreciate this oneness. But it is there. United by the truth of God's Word and bound together by the blood that has washed us clean of our sin, it is there. It is there because the words of Jesus declare that it is so. It is a spiritual oneness that we confess in the creed when we say that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." It is the unity of all those everywhere who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

Unfortunately, we can't express that unity with the whole Church. There is an inward unity of the Spirit and an outward unity of confession. The visible church was united for the first couple hundred years and partly because of that unity, the church grew rapidly. Jesus' prayer was fulfilled.

But then false teaching divided the church. The first significant division was brought on by Arius and his false teaching that Jesus was a little less than the Father. He was creation, not Creator. Other false teachings have further divided the visible church and it has hurt our witness. You see, the many denominations and teachings in the visible church today are not because God's Word is unclear or open to interpretation. All the division is because of false teachings that have divided the church.

Some would like us to have union despite the false teachings. But there is a difference between union and unity. Someone once put it this way: "You can tie the tails of two dogs together, and you'll have a union, but you won't have unity." Bringing churches together in a union without confessional unity is doing the same thing.

We rejoice in the inward unity of the Spirit which is ours through faith and we rejoice in the outward unity of confession which we enjoy in this church and in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. And that unity doesn't stop at national borders. That unity extends to Ukraine, Vietnam, Thailand, Mexico and even China, where we have churches that confess the same thing we do. What a beautiful fulfillment of Jesus' prayer.

Not only does Jesus pray that we may be one. He prayed that you may be one with him and the Father. *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* The relation of the persons of the Trinity makes our heads swim. Three distinct persons, yet one God. One in essence,

power and glory and yet a plurality. But Jesus prays that the unity of the persons of the Godhead is something he wants us to have with God. As the Apostle Peter said, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4)

Notice how that happens. It happens through our knowledge of him. We share in the divine nature through the Word and sacraments. That's what connects us to Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote of our connection to Christ in baptism. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:3,5) Baptism is like a glue that connects to Christ – to his death and his life. That's what Jesus prays for you, that you be one with God through his means of grace.

And that you share in his glory. *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.* The glory which the Father gives the Son is a token of his love for the Son. We should all be able to relate to this. A young man loves a young woman very much, and he asks her to marry him. He buys the most beautiful ring he can afford, as a visible demonstration of his love. And when the young woman accepts the proposal of marriage, she puts on the ring. And without exception she will find a way to move her hands to draw attention to the ring. She wants everyone to see it and comment how beautiful it is. Why? Because the ring is a token of her man's love for her. That's the way it is with the Lord's glory. It's a token of the Father's love for him.

Jesus has given us that same glory. The cross, empty tomb, baptism, Word and Lord's Supper are the tokens of his glory. They show his love for us. Followers of Christ on earth enjoy glory right now. They enjoy the status of being God's children. They enjoy complete forgiveness of sins. They look forward to an even more glorious future in heaven, to an eternal home that is free of sin and all its troubles.

During the Vietnam War, North Vietnamese captors would use various tactics to try to break the spirit of the American POWs. One tactic was their attempt to convince prisoners that no one at home care about them anymore, that everyone at home thought they were dead, that no one back in America was even thinking about them. It's a powerful tactic. After all, if you really begin to believe that others are no longer thinking about where you are and what you're going through, then despair is not far off.

The devil uses the same tactic. If he can get you to think of Jesus as the founder of a religion rather than your personal Savior, if he can get you to view Jesus as the main character of the Bible instead of the best friend you have, then it won't take long for you to assume that the Bible is just empty words.

But Jesus never stops think of you and praying for you. Jesus had you in mind when he went to Calvary's cross. He had you in mind when he began his ministry. He had you in mind when he came to earth as a child. He had you in mind even before the creations of the world. He is still thinking of you and wants you to experience his glory.

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 wants you to experience his glory but before we get there, a difficult journey is involved. Dorothy and her friends in *The Wizard of Oz* found out that there were people who didn't want them to get to the Emerald City and find what they were looking for. The yellow brick road was full of dangers.

Christians face dangers on our journey to the golden streets of the heavenly Jerusalem. Satan tries to lead Christians to trade in eternal glory for temporary treasures and sinful pleasures. Evil-minded people try to detour Christians to the broad road that leads to destruction. And the sinful nature inside each Christian wants nothing to do with the glory of God.

Jesus is praying you through all of those dangers. He wants you to see him in his glory. You will not have to wear your knuckles raw knocking on the closed doors of paradise. He wants you there. He died to get you there. He has shared his glory with you so that you can join him there. He is praying that you get there.

"I'll pray for you." We love to hear those words. They are even more precious when our Savior speaks them. Today, I pray that each of you hears Jesus' prayer for you. Hear his desires for you. He wants you to know his Father's love and let it shine in your life. He wants to live in you. And finally, he wants to never be separated from you as you live in the place he has prepared for you. That's what Jesus is praying for you.