

Maternal love in Jesus Christ, John 17:6-19 (05/09/21)

(Slide 1) A few years ago, I read a news article entitled, “Having Sons Can Shorten a Woman's Life Expectancy.” According to Nature magazine, a woman’s risk of death increased by 7% per year for each son born — a small but statistically robust effect. So, I instantly recalled some of the church members who have multiple boys. And, recently, I recalled this article as I raise Caleb, so I shared it with pastor Ran and she told me about another interesting news article based on the study, “Going to church could help you live longer.” Wow. It was so impressive to me, so I searched it, and I found it in the old health section of CNN. According to this news article, “The researchers found that women who went to church more than once a week had a 33% lower risk of dying during the study period compared with those who said they never went.” Furthermore, women who regularly attended church services also had higher rates of social support and optimism, had lower rates of depression and were less likely to smoke. Going to church could have a number of additional benefits that could, in turn, improve longevity. Although a doctor would not prescribe that we should go to church, we could know that faith life and health are closely connected. And since most of the women in the study were Protestant or Catholic, it is not clear whether a similar association would be found between religious service attendance and longevity for people of other Christian religions, Judaism or Islam. Also, this study did not explore the association in men, but their previous research suggests that male churchgoers also benefit, though their decrease in death rate is not as large as among women.

(Slide 2) Today is a very special day for me, because it is Ran’s first Mother’s Day with Christine as her daughter. Also, it reminds me of my mother and mother-in-law in South Korea who spent this day without her son and daughter. It’s time to learn about another culture. In South Korea we don’t have Mother’s Day, but we have Parents’ Day – May 8th, so we give thanks to both mother and father on the same day.

No one can exist without a mother. Some people might have said that they don't have a mother for various reasons, and some others might not know who their mother is, but everyone, even Jesus, was born through a mother. Without a mother's time, effort, suffering, pain, sacrifice, and love no one can be born. As I have witnessed pregnancy, childbirth, and participated in nurture through various ways, I feel deep appreciation for all the mothers in the world, also feel the mystery of God's creation, unconditional love of Jesus, and gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit. In spite of mother's love, still in Christianity, various masculine expressions are used to explain the image of the triune God. Although God does not have any gender, most of us regard God as male because we often confess God as father. And Jesus is obviously male. And only the Holy Spirit is depicted as a womanlike image. However, I think today's gospel scripture shows us a motherlike image of Jesus Christ.

(Slide 3) About 1,500 years ago, Cyril who was an archbishop of Alexandria designated John Chapter 17 as a "high priestly prayer." Since then, most preachers use this designation. In Old Testament days, once a year on the day of atonement, a high priest went to "the holy of holies" to make atonement for the sins of himself and Israel. Jesus' prayer in today's gospel text looks similar to atonement by the high priest. However, there is a huge difference between them. Unlike a high priest, Jesus does not have any sin, so his prayer does not need to include asking for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, his prayer is more like "the farewell prayer" rather than "the high priestly prayer."

(Slide 4) The Gospel of John has 21 chapters, and it can be divided into three parts. The first part is from Chapter 1 to 12, and it is about Jesus' public ministry. The second part is from chapter 13 to 17, and it is about the story of the day before Jesus' death. The third part is from chapter 18 to 21, and it is the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The day before being arrested, Jesus had the last supper with his disciples and washed their feet. And he preached his Farewell Discourse to the disciples. And then he preached once more to the

disciples on his way to the Kidron Valley, and then he prayed this farewell prayer to God. This prayer reminds us of who we are; we are the ones given by God, not belonging to the world but belonging to the kingdom of God. Also, this prayer shows us the heart of Jesus Christ who has taken care of us as the good shepherd but now has to leave, and so he prays to God for us. Jesus asked three things from God for us. 1. Protect us from division and make us one 2. Guard us from the evil 3. Sanctify us in the truth.

(Slide 5) First, verse 11 says, “protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. Through this, Jesus asked God to protect us from division and make us one. Jesus did not pray for uniformity or standardization. He never asked us to do nothing but praise, worship, and pray. God wants us to praise God while we are taking part in various works in the world. Jesus’ prayer means unity in diversity, because he wants us to live according to each one’s distinct personality, but he wants us to be one for the work of God. Augustine of Hippo stated this as “*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*” in Latin which is commonly translated as “unity in necessary things; freedom in doubtful things; love in all things” While we are enjoying our freedom, we need to keep our unity in God.

(Slide 6) Second, in verse 15, Jesus asked God to protect and guard us from evil. An English word “protect” is “*tereo*” in Greek, and it means to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard from loss or injury, properly, by keeping the eye upon, to observe. Now, since Christine can crawl and goes everywhere she wants, she does not want to get in her car seat, stroller, or in crib. Even she tries to stand up on her highchair. Although I tried to provide for her the best, she does not know that and tries to act on her own. Likewise, though God will make us way for us, we try to go a different way. Without God’s protection, we cannot help falling down and doing sinful things, but we think that we can live without God. The prayer of Jesus takes seriously the ever-present power of evil in the world. In his prayer, Jesus assumes that they can be protected spiritually from Satan, but it does not mean they will be

exempt from suffering and persecution. This prayer reminds us of the Lord's prayer which is "Lead us not into temptation" Jesus not only taught us to pray that we be free from evil by ourselves but also, he prayed for us the same thing.

(Slide 7) Third, in verse 17, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth." Because he believed that as God is holy, the disciples are to be holy. Holy is "*hagios*" in Greek, and it means sacred physically, pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially, consecrated. As verse 16 said, although we live in the world, but we do not belong to the world. Since we belong to the kingdom of God, we need to be holy, distinct from the world. When we do communion, we often use the bread and juice that we can easily buy at the market. However, once they are placed on the Lord's table and consecrated, they are no longer common bread and juice. Likewise, although we are common people who live in the world as one of the people, as we are sanctified in the truth of God, we are not just any one of them, but special children of God who live holy as God is holy.

(Slide 8) Every Mother's Day, we remember our mothers and give thanks for her love and care to us. As Christians, we need to do one more thing, which is remembering Jesus and giving thanks to God for his unconditional and steadfast love with more than a loving mother's heart. As no one can exist without a mother, no one can live wholly without the love of Jesus Christ. Only in this love, we can be one, united with each other, far away from evil, and live holy in the truth.

Praise God. Amen.