

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 28, 2017

St. John 17:1-11a

Jesus Prays for Himself and for His Disciples

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Dear friends in Christ Jesus, our ascended Lord and Savior,

May is the month for graduations. Some prefer the term commencements. They would rather mark the start of what is coming rather than the years just gone by. Yes, the graduates, parents and schools had achieved their goals. Now, the future stretched out ahead. In a sense, that is what Jesus was doing when he prayed on Maundy Thursday night what we call his High Priestly Prayer.

From the day of his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus' goal was to die on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. He would reach that goal in less than 24 hours after praying this prayer. After that, he would commence his glorification with his resurrection, ascension, and current rule over all things for the sake of his spiritual body, the church.

Turn your ears to your Savior's voice as **Jesus Prays for Himself and for His Disciples**. He prayed that his saving work would glorify his Father. He prayed that his Father protects his disciples remaining behind in the world.

Earlier in the evening in the upper room Jesus had spoken about many things to his disciples. He them there was a place for them in heaven and he would return for them. He told them that because he lives, referring to his coming resurrection, they also would live. Jesus told them he was the Vine and they were the branches. The world would hate them. He would send them the Holy Spirit. Jesus concluded by saying, "I have told you all these things so that you would have peace."

Then, acting as our one mediator with his Father. Jesus prayed. Jesus pointed ahead to his death on the cross, and to his disciples' life in the world after he ascended into heaven. Luther said this of the sermon/prayer combination, "Upon a good sermon there should follow a good prayer, that is: If one sets forth the Word, he should begin to utter prayerful sighs and to desire that it also may have power and work fruit." Jesus anticipated Luther's words. We heed them as we offer a general prayer after the sermon almost always connecting the two.

The first thing Jesus desired was that the glory of his suffering and death would go where it belonged. It may not seem there is any glory in suffering and death. It is the glory of the Father's eternal plan of salvation to redeem us lost and condemned creatures and make us the people of God instead. The Son prayed to his Father that his saving work would glorify his Father. Jesus did prayer for himself, "Glorify the Son," but only so the Father would get the glory.

Let's go back to the graduate. The graduated has complete the work. The diploma glorifies that work. Yet, the parents get glory as well through the graduate. Jesus said in anticipation of the outcome, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Our Savior has shown the world by word and deed that his Father and he are the true God. The Son would return to the presence of the Father in the full use of the glory that is his from eternity. When a son faithfully follows his father's will and accomplished the father's purpose, the glory of the son is equal to the glory of the father.

God the Father answered his Son's prayer in the affirmative. Jesus Christ held our lives as precious and dear. He redeemed us. He returned to his Father's presence and now rules with all our enemies under his feet. Jesus prayed that his saving work would glorify the Father. He does indeed.

There is a second part to Jesus' prayer. Jesus prayed for his disciples that his Father protect his disciples remaining behind in the world.

Soon Jesus would leave his disciples behind without his visible presence. The Father had given his Son these disciples having called them out of the world. He had preached the Word of God. They listened and believed. They trusted that the Father sent Jesus, the Son. They would remain as the glory of the Son's work on earth.

The church is to Christ's glory as he plants it, nourishes it, makes it blossom. However, they also would remain in the sinful world and suffer from the hands of their enemies. How do those two things fit together? Jesus' feet on the necks of his enemies, and those enemies attacking his disciples? The enemies have no authority or power. They can take lives, goods, fame, child and wife. But as Luther wrote, "Let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won. The kingdom ours remaineth."

Jesus also had told the disciples that he was not leaving them as orphans but would return to them. He did return on the third day. He will return on the Last Day from the right hand of God where he ascended. This part of the High Priestly Prayer is a prayer for the disciples at that time.

The third part of Jesus prayer as our perfect High Priest, not included in our text, is for us. We have come to faith through their work and their words in the Holy Scripture. This was possible because the Father heard Jesus' prayer for them and protected them. We can take a quick listen to that part of Jesus' prayer for us. Jesus prayed, "I pray also for them who will believe in me through their message."

We might well hear those graduates I mentioned, say to their parents at their commencement, "Thank you mom and dad for setting me off on this course I now have completed." We might well hear the parents say, "We are pleased with you that you have completed the work." All will look forward to many others benefitting in the future from that work completed and now begun.