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“Jesus’ Prayer”

Proverbs 31:11-31 John 17:6-19 | John 5:9-13

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS 31:11-31

This morning’s passage from Proverbs comes from King Solomon. Solomon wrote the Proverbs to give instruction to his children. In this final chapter he describes a cherished wife and describes the things she does for her husband and her children. We don’t know which wife Solomon was describing, because he had thousands of wives. The qualities he describes are ones that we all should strive to attain. Hear the word of God from Proverbs 31:11-31

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few weeks we have been examining portions of the section in the gospel of John that is described as Jesus’ Farewell discourse. It’s Jesus’ Famous Last words, his best parting shot, and his last opportunity to tell his disciples things he wanted them to remember most. Think of these chapters as Jesus’ commencement address to his graduating class of the last 3 years of his school of discipleship.

If these chapters are Jesus’ commencement address, then chapter 17 is his closing prayer. Most Commencement festivities have an opening prayer. Jesus’ commencement address had a closing prayer. Hear the closing part of his closing prayer.

Let us pray, Thank you for praying for your disciples, letting them overhear your concern for them. Help us to listen to your prayer for them and overhear your concern for even us. Open our hearts to receive the encouragement, the assurance and the confidence they drew from your prayer. This we pray in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In speaking to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod convention Bishop David Preus of the American Lutheran Church gently chided the delegates, saying that while some people seem to view the church as a loaf of bread, he preferred to think of the church as more like a fruitcake, where there is always room for a few nuts!

Of course there are theological issues and political issues that make us distinct from one another. But Jesus’ knew that would be the case. Jesus’ prayer was not that we be uniform or be unanimous, but that we would have unity. That we would have unity in common—that we would have a common unity—that we would be a Community of faith.

Very few people are expert in anything all by themselves. They need a supporting community. Show me an athlete who achieves excellence all alone,

apart from the athletic community. (Even those who excel at individual sports like golf or tennis or track and field have a bevy of trainers and coaches helping them.) Very few wise people become so without the accumulated wisdom of the centuries as expressed in colleges and universities and libraries. Do you know a good musician who was not trained, nurtured and sustained by the music community? Medical people are more like ensembles and symphonies than soloists. What business leader does it all on his own or her own without dedicated experts in finance, engineering, personnel, and marketing? Excellence requires participation in, and support of, a community.

Yesterday our fellowship hall was filled with young actors in the making as the Baytown Little Theater Youth program put on a Spaghetti dinner complete with a talent show. One boy took a turn at playing a didgeridoo. He was only able to play one note and it sounded more like the Carnival Cruise that left Galveston yesterday when I was down there tasting some of my son's barbeque he entered in a cook off there. Cooking brisket is a team effort,...and the didgeridooist is going to need some practice and a community that will listen and support him until he perfects his playing.

It is the same in the church. Very few achieve Christian maturity all by themselves. Seldom is the Bible studied diligently without the aid of teachers who rely on the diligent work of scholars. Rarely are people led to generosity by their own impulses.

On the night that Jesus prayed this prayer for his disciples, he knew he was about to move on from his earthly life. He knew the road ahead of him would lead to his torture and death. He knew he would be leaving his students, his disciples, his followers behind. He knew that they would face some of the same tests, and persecution and even death that he was about to face. And SO he prayed for them.

Jesus prayed that his followers would be one. The people that Jesus prayed would be one ... would be ... scattered. Thomas would go to India. Philip would go Samaria. James went to Spain. John went to Asia. Peter would go to Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea. Bartholomew went to India and Armenia. St. Paul went to Cyprus, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, Crete and Italy. Andrew went to Russia, Romania, to the Ukraine and became the patron saint of Scotland the land where the Presbyterian Church was born.

Once a week we gather in this place to worship God. But then we scatter into more than a hundred different directions for the next 6 days. We are One church, gathered to grow but scattered to sow in over a 100 locations. Remember, following Jesus is so much more than going to church—it's being the church wherever we go. Jesus' prayer for us was that we would be united in purpose and scattered to carry out and fulfill that purpose.

Like most families, our church family's day-to-day operation may not always agree. Like in our families, parents can disagree with each other, or the children, or the youngsters with each other. There are so many possibilities for dissension - goals will vary, opinions often differ and wills may clash.

The church as the family of God has characteristics similar to other family units but with infinitely more possibilities for disagreement and dissension. But there are also infinitely more possibilities for mutual support and care and concern.

Jesus prayed that we would be protected. We all need someone to keep us safe. Policemen are called to protect and serve our communities. This coming Friday St. Mark's United Methodist will host a service honoring those who lost their lives in the line of duty. Laws are designed to protect our society. One way signs are meant to be observed.

Yesterday as I was leaving the New Covenant Presbytery's pastor's brunch in downtown Houston I made a turn and started the wrong way down a one way street. I saw a row of cars all coming at me several blocks away. I also saw a police car waiting at a light right in front of me. I stopped....then I made a U turn and a left turn fully expecting to hear a siren .. but I didn't . I was grateful that the cars headed toward me were far away and no one was hurt. I was grateful that either the policeman didn't see me or chose to ignore me because I've already taken defensive driving online this year.

Parents teach honesty and integrity to their children so they will then grow up to be productive citizens of the world. Yet some children need protection from their own parents. Some parents need protection from their children. So why should it surprise us that our souls need to be safeguarded from the corruption of the world. Jesus prayed for his disciples that the Father would protect them and keep them from losing their way in the world.

Finally, Jesus prayed that we might know God.

On this evening before his crucifixion, Jesus prays. He prays that the disciples will come to know God in a personal way. Jesus isn't talking about knowing God like you know your ABC's. He's not talking about assimilating data about God like the graduates we will celebrate next Sunday have assimilated data about Biology and Math and History. Jesus wants us to know God intimately. Jesus wants us to teach that to others, especially our children.

The right way to seek unity is for each church, and indeed, each individual believer to seek to be themselves and to reach those that God will reach through them. It involves sharing the love of Jesus with folks just as we are, where we are. It's being God's family and reaching out to folks to welcome and include them in God's family. St. Mark's United Methodist across the street will reach folks that we will not reach. But we are called to reach folks that they won't.

Last Saturday my son-in-law raced his car on the Autocross at the track where the Police Academy has its Precision Driving Course. He wasn't racing against other cars. He was racing against himself, trying to beat his best time. On his fourth run he did his best time of 51.4 seconds.

Have any of you ever seen a greyhound race? Greyhound racing is very different from horseracing. In greyhound racing that there are no jockeys, so they have to use some other means of keeping the dogs running in the right direction. The greyhounds are trained to chase a mechanical rabbit that runs on a little track. The remote-control rabbit goes just fast enough to stay ahead of the dogs.

A few years ago at a racetrack in Florida, a funny thing happened. The dogs were all crouched in their cages, waiting for the start of the race. The starting gun sounded. The cage doors dropped open and the dogs took off after the mechanical rabbit.

As the rabbit rounded the first turn, however, an electrical short caused the rabbit to explode and catch on fire. In seconds, all that was left of the rabbit was some black stuff hanging on a bit of wire.

When this happened, the dogs were so confused they didn't know what to do. Most of them stopped running. Some of them just lay down on the track with their tongues hanging out. A couple of them went on around the track at top speed, but without the rabbit to chase they ran into a wall and broke several ribs. Several of the greyhounds just started howling at the crowd. Not one dog finished the race. (1)

Sometimes I think we in the church are somewhat like those greyhounds when we lose sight of our purpose and forget why the church exists. We exist to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. Where his love is unknown, there is darkness. We must persevere in our work of witnessing to Christ and reflecting his light in our world. The future of the faith is at stake.

The church is not a business. It is not an institution. It is not a corporation. It is a family, a family of friends. I believe that each church family that will reach out will reach folks that no one else will reach. The more churches we have, the more people will be reached for the Kingdom of God.

Did you notice that in Jesus' prayer he not only prayed for his disciples but also Jesus prayed for us? In verse 20 he prays, "I pray not only for them, meaning his disciples, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. I pray that they may all be one!"

In that Upper Room so long ago, Jesus was able to look down the corridor of time and envisioned us in this room. He prayed not only for those he had spent

the last 3 years teaching, but for everyone who would come to believe in him as a result of their sharing what they had learned. That is us.

Jesus prayed for each one of us in this room. He prayed for every one whose lives will be touched as the result of our following the example of those who heard Jesus pray his commencement prayer. Jesus not only knew them, He knows you and me and he wants you and me and all of us and every believer in every church in all of time to be united, to be one.

The genius of God's plan is obvious. If we recognize that we are all members of the same family, ideally, we will stop fighting with each other and instead begin standing with one another and working together to bring people to Christ and to become an answer to prayer for those who cry out to God for help.

Jesus prayed that the church would be one, that the church would be protected from the temptations of the world, but not taken out of the world. He prayed that the members of the church could know him and that we would make him known by the love we share and by the way we live as we live out our common unity in our ...community.

Over the centuries - from the very day of Jesus' resurrection until now - the Christian Faith has been kept alive in association, person with person, people together. Historically, it has been in community that the Word has been preserved. And still today, it is the case that our faith is born, nurtured, maintained and sustained in community. .. even if that community is more like a fruitcake than a plain loaf of bread. If we are one, if we are protected and if few know God and make God known, do, we can do more than asking Jesus to answer our prayers, but we can strive to become the answers to ... Jesus' Prayer.

Let us pray. God of wisdom, power, and majesty, who are we that you should look with favor upon us? You have written your law upon our hearts, so that we may know of your love and teach others of your love. We rest in the assurance that you will never forsake us. We give you thank for the redeeming love of Jesus.

Lord, help us to be still, so that we can hear you speak. Amid the babble of human speech, give us ears to listen to you voice. As demands are made and pressure mounts, put us at ease and sustain us by your presence.

Lord, help us to find the discipline to be more faithful. Time passes quickly and our tasks are undone. Translate our desires into commitment; keep us from putting off decisions that demand energy and effort. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us when the way seems unsure, and instill within us that measure of confidence that will enable us to act.

Lord, enlighten us with your wisdom. Illumine the dark places of our nagging doubts. By your power make us bolder and better disciples. Give us the courage to forsake the easy life and risk personal security so that others may learn of your love. IN your majesty keep us ever conscious of our dependence on you and ready to give you praise.

Lord we pray for those on our hearts, for those in need of healing, of shelter, of food, of employment, in need of a helping hand, a listening ear, a community of faith. Be with them and us as we seek to be a living, vibrant community of faith.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the mothers that brought us into this world. Jesus, we thank you for the mother that brought YOU into this world. Holy Spirit we thank you for your presence that abides with us now and will abide with us forever. We thank you that your Spirit works through others who are there for us, who understand us, and who stand beside us as we face the challenges of life. Thank you for their faithfulness and for their love and their comfort.

We thank you for mothers who are now with you. We thank you that their work is done, their toil is ended their time of striving has ceased. We pray for mothers on earth who have the uphill battle of caring for children ahead of them. We pray for children that they will come to appreciate what their mothers go through for them. We pray for children who are orphans and who have no mother or father. For them we cling to your promise that you will not leave them as orphans but that your Spirit will come to them and through others like us provide the comfort and care and understanding all children deserve. Finally we pray for your church as Jesus did. We pray for the nurturing role your church plays in caring for others something that we all are called to do as a part of your family. .