

Gethsemane Lutheran Church

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Lectionary Bible Study for Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17: 6-19

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.” John 17:20

This week the lectionary brings us two sets of readings. On the fortieth day since Easter (May 13), we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus. Then on Sunday, we continue with the Gospel of John and the words that Jesus says to and for his disciples during their final meal together.

Taken all together, these readings bring us what might seem to be a paradox: Jesus, so divine that he ascends into the heavens, caught up into the sky like Elijah the prophet...and Jesus, so human that he prays earnestly for his friends and asks God to protect them.

The tension between glorious, ascending Divine and troubled, petitioning Human is the tension of our own lives. Most of the time, we feel primarily Human. Like Jesus, we are on our knees in times of struggle and concern, asking God to protect our children, heal our neighbor, comfort our friend. We will not ascend into the heavens like Jesus, but we also have the Holy Spirit – spark of the Divine – within our bodies. Sometimes we remember this: a beautiful sunset, a sudden feeling of peace, the unexpected help of a stranger. We remember that our spiritual lives need deep nurture and care.

How beautiful to know that our God, the Creator who made all the world, cares so deeply for us. If you have not read this prayer by Jesus recently, take time to read all of John 17. After speaking to the disciples,

Jesus turns to God and begins to pray. The confidence and intimacy of Jesus' prayer exemplifies the kind of prayer that he has commended to the disciples. This passage is sometimes called the second Lord's Prayer or the "Priestly Prayer."

First, Jesus prays for himself, in full awareness of what is to come. The Gospel writer uses the word "glorify" to signal the work of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. By his actions, Jesus makes visible the presence of God, so Jesus' glorification also glorifies God.

Then Jesus prays for the community. The community of believers has been created because of Jesus' work in revealing God. There is a mutuality at play here: God's initiative ("they were yours, and you gave them to me") and human response ("they have kept your word...they have believed that you sent me" (v. 8)). The prayer highlights the unity of Father, Son, and believing community.

Jesus prays for the community to have **unity**: "they may be one, as we are one" (v. 11).



Jesus prays for the community to have **joy**: “so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves” (v. 13).

Jesus prays for the community to have **protection**: “protect them from the evil one” (v. 15).

Jesus prays for the community to be **sanctified**: “sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (v. 17). The word “sanctify” (hagiadzō) has the same root as the word “holy” (hagios). To “sanctify” is to be set apart to do God’s work in the world (see 10:36). This is not about withdrawing from the world, but about **dwelling within God’s word** so deeply that our values,

priorities, and choices become shaped by the Holy Spirit. It is through sanctification that we remember that we, too, are more than flesh and bone...we are sacred, beloved, and sent to bring God’s love to the world.

The lectionary ends at verse 19...but keep reading! Jesus says: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one” (v. 20). This verse makes it clear that Jesus prays not only for the disciples, but for all those who will believe in him because of the disciples and the spread of the gospel. Jesus prays for US... here today, in Portland, Oregon in the waning days of a global pandemic, in the warm Springtime, in the uncertainty and the longing and the hope...**Jesus prays for us today!**

How does it feel to know that Jesus prays for you? What do you need for yourself as individual this week (unity, joy, protection, sanctification)? What does our church need? **How might you pray like Jesus for our community of faith?**

Jesus, thank you for showing me what it means to pray for myself and for others. Help me to follow you. Put your words in the scriptures deep within my heart and increase my faith. Bless our church community, God, and bring us unity, joy, protection, and a clear sense of your calling. Send us out into the world to for the sake of mercy, justice and peace. Amen.