

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 17:6-19  
Acts 1:15-17,21-26  
Psalm 1  
1 John 5:9-13

May 13, 2018  
The Seventh Sunday of Easter

---

*Thank you God for happy hearts, for rain and sunny weather. Thank you God for our food and that we are together.*

*Good food, good meat, good God, let's eat.*

*Yay, God! Amen.*

I have a confession to make. All of these prayers have been said at one time or another around our dinner table. Sure, we also have more formal prayers that adults tend to say – with appropriate thanksgivings and prayer requests for those in need. But, my favorite ones are always the ones that kids say – unfiltered and honest – without worry if they will mess up. They just say what's on their mind and if they are particularly hungry, the prayers will get shorter and shorter and have a great deal of enthusiasm...thus the "Yay, God" prayer that pops up from time to time.

We learn to pray from a young age – at dinner tables, at bed time, at church. More than likely, we learned how to pray from a parent, a godparent, or a friend, or maybe from a long-winded preacher who seemed to make praying feel more like an exercise in endurance. However we learned to pray, hopefully along the way, we learned to put our hope in something greater than ourselves; to turn over our concerns and our needs; to express our gratitude; and above all to trust that we are loved and that our prayers are heard.

Because at its essence, the simple act of prayer points to our ability to put our lives in God's hands.

To be sure, our prayers take many forms, from the innocence of childhood to the complexities of our later years, we pray because we deeply want to be loved and cared for and we want that same security for those whom we pray for. And if we know anything about prayer, we know it is above all, a loving act.

Our Gospel reading takes us to the heart of such a loving act. It is Jesus' last meal with his disciples. They are in the Upper Room and Jesus knows at this point in the story that he is going to be betrayed. He knows that he will be put on trial and crucified. I can't imagine what he is going through – the pain, the fear. He could take this moment to pray for anything – to ask God to deliver him from what is to come, to ask for some kind of relief, for a miracle...anything so that he doesn't have to face what is ahead. But, instead, he prays *for* his disciples. Not for himself but for those whom he loves.

I want you to notice what Jesus does. Jesus asks God to protect them and more specifically, he asks that God protect them from evil. Jesus knows that the future will be hard – that life will not be easy but in spite of what they may face, Jesus wants them to live in wholeness. To me, it is so incredibly moving to know that in Jesus' moment of personal strife, he puts aside his own needs and he prays for those he loves – for their wellbeing and for their happiness.

And I want you to notice one more thing – Jesus said this prayer so that his disciples could hear him speak those words. He said his prayer in their presence. How many times have you heard someone pray for you? In your presence? Think about the power of that moment when you hear your life lifted up in prayer to God – to have confidence that throughout your life, you will be protected and watched over, that God will care for you, that others will seek to support you. That you are so loved that that prayer for your safety, for your healing, for your strength, for your happiness is not only heard but acted upon by God.

Jesus gave the disciples this gift. And he gives the same gift to us.

Verse 21 which immediately follows our Gospel text for this morning states these additional words of Jesus' prayer...*"I ask not only on the behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word."*

Why is this important? It's important because not only is Jesus praying for the individuals whom he loves standing right in front of him, he is also praying for *everyone* who will hear their message from that point forward. Believers who came after that day – who have been taught generation after generation how to pray, how to believe, and how to love. That includes each and every one of us.

Take that in - Jesus prayed for us. Specific, clear, loving, heartfelt words of hope and promise.

What would it feel like to hear Jesus praying for you? What would it feel like to know other people are praying for you in that same spirit of love and compassion? It is powerful beyond measure.

Yesterday, a group of women from our church had the honor to attend the Mother's Day Breakfast at County Line Baptist Church and I have to say it was one of the most uplifting and inspirational mornings I have had in a long time. The room was packed, it was hot, the food was delicious and the words spoken that morning were what I think each of us needed to hear. Our preacher for the morning was Minister Casandra Truzy and she is an amazing woman of God.

By the end of her sermon, many of us were in tears. There was clapping and cheering and amen upon amens. But there was one thing she said that stood out to me above all others. She said that you were created with a purpose. Each and every person, each and every child – no matter how you came into this world and no matter the circumstances you may have to deal with in this life. You were created with a purpose. And so, we are to lift one another up in our words, in our actions, and especially in our prayers so that our children, our brothers and sisters in Christ,

may have the opportunity to live into that purpose. Because that purpose was created for you by our loving God who hears our prayers and has great things in store for you.

Today, we are going to do a lot a praying with this intention in mind. Because we are going to be praying for God's purpose for Alexander Huppman. As we baptize him this morning, I want you to listen to the beautiful words that express our love for him and for his family. We will pray for God to deliver him from sin, to open his heart to grace and truth, to fill him with the holy spirit, to keep him in faith, to teach him to love others, to send him into the world as a witness to God's love, and to bring him peace.

Our prayers for Alexander are because we know that God has a purpose just for him and we are going to do all in our power to love and support him so that he may grow into the person God has intended him to be. We pray for him and we know that God hears our prayers. We pray because we know that God's love is poured out on this place today for Alexander and for his family.

But, we also know that on the day Christ prayed for his disciples that he was also praying for Alexander. God, protect him all of his days.

This is God's prayer for Alexander and it is God's prayer for us.