

Pastor John Schwehn
Sermon, Easter 7A, 2017

Acts 1:6-14
John 17:1-11

Growing up as a kid – and especially when I reached my teenage years – there were certain moments that I dreaded. They were the moments when one of my parents, or another older and wiser adult, would seize upon an opportunity to teach me a little life lesson, to give me some mini lecture on the world I would be facing, on how to behave in certain situations.

These special “talks” ranged from topics such as table etiquette, driving tips, why it was important to go to confirmation class and church, how to live a healthy lifestyle, what I should do if I found myself at a party where people were drinking alcohol, and...of course...there was “THE talk,” the big one that every child dreads, the one on sex and intimacy and relationships.

One reason that these talks always seemed pointless and embarrassing to me is that they usually happened *before* I had had an actual life experience that warranted them. The adults in my life who felt it their duty to lecture me knew something that I did not yet know because nothing that I had experienced gave me any idea that it was a thing worth knowing – like why you shouldn’t let your gas tank get too low in the wintertime, or why it was important to give some money to the church, or what to do should you ever catch on fire (stop, drop, roll).

The wisdom of elders in my life was found in the advice and counsel of those who knew that bad and complicated things would happen to me: I would suffer. I would grieve. I would fail. I would make bad decisions. So, to prepare me for this world, every moment was an opportunity to impart some knowledge that might help when the time came.

I want to talk about two scenes of scripture with you today.

Scene One happens in an upper room among close friends and the teacher named Jesus whom they followed. It is the night before Jesus will be arrested and handed over to the authorities who will execute him. It is the night before everything will change. But on that night, in that moment, everyone is feeling the love. Jesus has washed their feet, has taught them to be servants to one another, has given them the assurance of God's presence and forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

And then, at the end of the evening (our gospel reading for today), Jesus begins to pray. He prays for these disciples, even though they're sitting right next to him. He prays, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

I imagine these disciples at the end of this evening wondering all of a sudden about why Jesus is suddenly so concerned about *unity*. I imagine that never had they felt so unified, so together, so committed by faith and love to Jesus as they felt in that moment.

But Jesus knew that he must pray for unity. Like those talks I received from my parents and elders growing up, Jesus knew that a time of discord and fear was most certainly coming for them. Jesus knew that the life of faith they would follow after he was gone would not be always so full of nights like these, when they could sit in the loving presence of the very one they followed.

Jesus prays for his disciples, for his friends. Jesus prays for us. This is the first bit of good news, my friends: that Jesus prays for us. Jesus prays for you.

Scene Two. Fast forward about fifty days from that upper room. Jesus has been betrayed, abandoned, denied, and killed by these same friends. Three days later he rises from the dead and finds them huddled behind locked doors. He offers words of forgiveness and peace.

Scripture then tells us that Jesus spends forty more days with these disciples before ascending into heaven. “The Holy Spirit is coming,” Jesus has told them. He tells them to go back to Jerusalem – go back to the city where he was crucified – and wait for the Spirit there.

So the disciples go. Even though Jesus was just killed in this city; even though the authorities are out there looking for those Jesus followers so that they could kill them, too; even though Jerusalem is the *last* place they wanted to be...they go. And they wait.

And, as they waited in Jerusalem, I wonder whether that Jesus prayer began ringing through their ears again: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

It would have been so easy to flee. To run away, leaving friends behind. Unsure of a future, grieving the loss of their former way of life, terrified for their very lives...these are the moments when our bonds of unity and trust begin to fray: A change comes. An election happens. A loss is suffered. Whatever it is that assumes power of our hearts and our imaginations and our faith, this is the very thing that likely also threatens our unity, our understanding of belonging to God and to one another. “Where is Jesus?” we might begin to wonder.

But Jesus is here, and he is praying for us. He prayed for his disciples in that upper room all those years ago, and he prays for his people now. That we might be one. Jesus prays that nothing will separate us from the love of God, that *nothing* will separate us from the body of Christ.

Yes, those disciples heard that prayer those many nights ago. And I hope they remembered it. Because so often we forget. We know that we forget, so we set apart times when we might remember. We have weekends like this one – Memorial Day – that we might not forget the precious lives of all of the men and women who have died fighting in the armed forces.

Every Sunday, we gather together in order to remember the promises of God again: you are loved, you are forgiven, you are a child of God. In fact, nothing can separate us from each other – ever – because we have all been baptized into the one body of Christ, into one family of God.

Jesus prays, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

Jesus prays for us. Jesus prays that we might be one. Let’s not forget it. Let’s instead be like those disciples. Because, by some miracle, they did not forget that prayer of Jesus. As we heard read in Acts, those men and women followers of Jesus go to Jerusalem and they do not flee. Instead, they pray. They pray without ceasing, day and night, doing the one thing they knew how to do. After all, Jesus had prayed for them.

My friends, we are one. We are one body, one family of God. We belong to Christ Jesus, and, whenever we gather together, Christ promises to be right in the midst of us.

If the disciples were listening closely that night as Jesus prayed for them, they would have also heard him say this remarkable thing: “And this is eternal life,” Jesus prays, “that these disciples may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Eternal life! Knowing God and knowing Jesus – this is eternal life! Why is it important that we understand that we are one? Because it is by knowing God and Jesus in this place – in prayer, in bread and wine, in water – that we may actually know life eternal. What a remarkable thing.

So come forward in a few minutes and receive the bread and wine. *Remember* God’s promises for you, and feast on eternal life. We are one in Christ. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

Review the church year with stoles:

It's the end of the season of Easter! We won't be saying Alleluias as much so let's say it really loud three more times...

Here is the journey we all have been on since last November.

Blue

White

Green

White

Red

Green

This summertime we will be going to lots of different places – maybe to camp or to visit family or the cabin or sports – but we need to remember in this time that God is *always* with us