

The Rev. Mary Haggerty
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
7th Sunday of Easter, May 16, 2021
John 17:6-19

John's Jesus has a lot to say! He uses a whole lot of words this morning to convey the Good News of God to us. And the words that John chooses for Jesus are densely theological, even metaphysical. These lofty words twist and turn and curve around themselves. What is he trying to say? How are we to understand it? Sometimes Jesus as portrayed in John's Gospel, can seem above-it-all. He is in charge and he's got it all wrapped up. He is clearly The Anointed One – without a doubt he is God.

But, language aside, we meet Jesus here in a very human moment. This is the moment between the Last Supper and his betrayal and arrest. Jesus has just enjoyed a final meal with those he holds closest in the world. And he is anticipating the condemnation that is to come. He knows he is leaving his beloved disciples and he has spent the last three chapters teaching them about his mission, his nature, his destiny, and their role in all of this.

And now he stops to pray for them. He stops everything and he prays for those he loves.

This seems to be a prayer that was meant to be overheard. Jesus has been teaching them and preparing them, and he stops in the middle of it and offers a prayer for them. I wonder how that felt to the confused, frightened disciples? To be prayed for in the midst of their uncertainty?

The community that John was writing for would have heard these words in the midst of their own struggles. They were in conflict with their own people because of their belief in Jesus and were soon to be thrown out of the temple. I wonder how they would have heard these words?

What would it have felt like for them to hear this prayer in the throes of the conflict they were living in?

We hear these words of Jesus in the midst of a global pandemic, in a time of great social upheaval, of grief and discord. What does it feel like to hear this prayer of Jesus today? A prayer for us in our own time of uncertainty.

We don't often think of Jesus praying FOR us. We pray to Jesus. We ask, we thank, we apologize. We tend to feel like we could always be "better" at prayer. As a Spiritual Director I sometimes ask people, "How is your prayer life?" I have yet to hear anyone say, "Oh it's great. I have it down pat and it's easy!"

Let's face it. It's not easy to stop, to let go of all that we think is important, and to sit in the quiet to pray. The good news this morning is that Jesus prays for us. Jesus's prayer this morning, like all prayer, is an act of love. It's a laying down of himself, a sacrificial love, to pray for our needs.

And what does Jesus pray for the disciples in their confusion, for John's community in their distress, for us in our time of conflict and fear? He prays for unity and protection.

He doesn't pray that things will be easy. He knows they won't be. He knows that there are strong forces in this world that draw us away from God, forces that draw us away from one another, away from love. Jesus prays for our protection because he knows the world preaches a gospel of scarcity instead of abundance. Jesus knows well that the gospel of the world is one of fear instead of courage. It lures us toward selfishness instead of sacrificial love. He knows God's Way of Love won't be easy on us in this world. Jesus prays that we may be upheld even in the chaos by God's love and tender care. He doesn't pray for our escape from the world. Jesus

prayed for the disciples and John's community and he prays for us this very day that we may know we are God's own and that we are bound to all humanity in God.

What do you want Jesus to pray for you this morning? What do you need protection from? Where do you need some division in your life to be healed? Do you need peace in the face of loss? Do you need encouragement as this pandemic seems to wind on? Do you want to feel deep joy that seems to elude you? Do you need companionship in a time of loneliness? What is it that you need Jesus to pray for right now?

There are cards and pencils at the end of each pew. Take a minute now to write down one word or phrase that captures what you want to ask Jesus to pray for you. And write it down on this card...

Now tuck this card into your pocket or your purse. Throughout the week go back to what you have written and reflect on it. Let it remind you that Jesus knows your need. Let it reassure you that Jesus cares about you and prays for you. Ask yourself how you sense Jesus being present to your concern? Notice the ways that God might be responding to your prayer.

One of the ways that God responds to prayer is through each other, this motley crew that we call "the church." In a few minutes we are going to bless your Shepherd Circle leaders. Shepherd Circles are a form of prayer and pastoral care for each other. They are a way of connecting to the love and compassion and care of God for each one of us. Your Shepherd Circle leaders will check in with you from time to time to see how you are doing. I hope you will entrust your prayers and hopes to one another. My hope is that the leaders will share the group contact information with their whole group so that you can be the presence of Christ for one another in a more intimate way. My prayer is that these circles can become small circles of care

within our larger circle that is St. Barnabas. Just as St. Barnabas is a circle of care within the community that surrounds us.

Let's face it, sometimes it's hard to pray. So, pray for one another. Have confidence that Jesus prays for you just as he did for his disciples so long ago. Jesus loves you. Jesus cares for you. Jesus prays for you. That is what makes it possible for us to do the same for each other.