

# **Easter 7B**

## **John 17:6-19**

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I always think of the last few weeks of May as a time of leaving. For students and teachers, the school year is ending. Teachers are leaving for a much-needed break. Students are leaving one grade to enter the next. Many of them are graduating from grade school, high school, college, and vocational programs, leaving behind their school and classmates, and preparing to enter a new time of their lives. We will leave Spring behind as Memorial Day signals the beginning of summer activities and fun. Brides and grooms are preparing to leave parents and the single life as the major wedding month of June approaches. Regardless of the reason for the leave-taking, there is always the niggling question in the back of our minds, “Am I prepared for the next phase of my life?”, and the second is like unto it, “Did I prepare them enough for the world that they will face?”

For those are the questions that I believe are running through the mind of Jesus in today's Gospel reading. While we celebrated Christ's Ascension on Thursday, today we are back in the upper room on that Maundy Thursday night before Jesus' arrest. Jesus has done all He can do to prepare His disciples for what is to come. He has shown them the way of love. He has taught them the truth. He has given them everlasting life and the keys to the kingdom. But is it enough, He wonders? He is leaving them. He has done His best to prepare them to live in the world without Him. But still He worries that all He said to them, all He has shown them, all He has taught them, may not be enough to sustain them through the trials and tribulations that they will face, and so, He prays.

A somewhat confusing prayer I will admit. Of the four Gospels, John is my favorite, but there are times, like today, when it makes my head spin and say, “Wait. What?” This prayer is packed full of words that have double meanings, repetition to the point of making my eyes glaze over, and sentences that make repeated U-turns like a driver who has lost all sense of where he is going. It is so theologically packed that hours upon hours can be spent unpacking it all. Luckily for you, we no longer live in the age of two to four-hour long sermons.

What strikes me most, is that Jesus prayed for His disciples. At the end of the day, when all the prepping and planning are done, when all that can be done has been done, when there is nothing left to do, but it still doesn't seem like enough, Jesus prays for those He loves.

Our lectionary cuts His prayer in half. We heard the first half. If we had kept reading, we would hear Jesus pray, “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.” Jesus prays not just for the Twelve who were with Him in the Upper Room that night, but for all future disciples as well, meaning that Jesus prays for you and for me. He ends the prayer with, “... so that the love with which you have

loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Jesus prays for those He loves, for you, for me, and for all who follow in His footsteps to be filled with the love of God, so that we can share that love with everyone we encounter in our daily lives.

He knew that the way of love that He asks us to walk is a path that is fraught with temptation and hardship, because the path we walk as followers of Christ is a path that runs counter to the one the world would have us walk. The world, as in our society and our culture, thrives on selfishness, fear, and hate; it is driven by a belief that scarcity is the norm. As followers of Christ, we thrive on love. Love that sees, not scarcity, but God’s abundance. Love that drives us to share God’s abundance with others. Love that overcomes hate. Love that gives us courage in the face of fear and allows us to move forward as we lean on Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. Love that believes that all God’s children should thrive and grow.

Living a life of agape love isn’t easy. Jesus knew this, but He was leaving and would no longer be around to teach His followers how to do with deal with all that they will encounter. He would no longer be physically present to protect His disciples from peril or to steer them away from temptation. And this very thought, gnawed at Him and worried Him. At one time or another, most of us have been in this position in some way. There are those of us who must leave our children home alone while we go to work. Some of us have watched our children leave for college, a job, or as they married and moved away. Others have had to leave behind friends who saw them through thick-and-thin because life pulled them in different directions. Still others, are struggling through leaving the ones they love because of chronic illness or the natural course of aging. There are other scenarios as well, but it all comes down to this- “Am I prepared for the next phase of my life without those I love in a place that is unfamiliar?” and “Did I prepare them enough for the world that they will face without me?”

When it comes down to it, we can’t live someone else’s life for them. We can teach them the truth. We can show them the way of love. We can prepare them as much as possible for the dangers, pitfalls, and temptations of the world. We can love them just as Jesus loves us. And when it seems that there is nothing left that we can do, then, like Jesus, we can show our love by praying for them.

I realize, at times, that prayer just doesn’t feel like enough. When you must stand by helpless, as someone you love fights for their life against illness or their own body’s betrayal. When you get a phone call that a loved one is injured, particularly if it is your child. When those you love are making choices that you feel deep in your heart are bad choices and nothing you say or do will change their mind. When the world keeps knocking down someone you love. At times like these you feel compelled to act. Your mind screams at you to do something, anything, to protect them from harm, to make the hurt and pain go away, to not have to stand idly by as they turn down dark and dangerous paths. At these moments, when we feel that we have failed those we love in some way, prayer often seems too passive, but it is at these times that prayer is the most powerful act you can do.

When we feel powerless, prayer is the power that keeps us going. Prayer keeps us moving forward. Prayer sustains us. Jesus knew this. As He broke bread with His disciples for the last time before His arrest and crucifixion, He looked at those who had walked miles and miles of

dusty roads with Him. He thought of all those who would follow Him and live His commandment to love long after He had returned to His father in heaven, and He prayed for us all. He prayed that we would come together as one to support each other. He prayed for our protection from the dangers and temptations of the world. He prayed that we will know we are loved. He prayed that we will be drawn into the Trinitarian Circle. He prayed for our joy.

Prayer is one of the simplest and greatest acts of love that one person can do for another. The world will try to tell us that prayer is meaningless. Jesus shows us otherwise for His prayer of love for us is resounding in our ears over two thousand years later. At the end of the day, when we have done all that can be done for those we love, it is prayer that brings us peace. Pray for those you love. Pray for those who Christ call you to love whether you know them or not. for prayer, like love, is one of the most powerful things on this earth.

Amen