

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Stirling

Sunday 16th, May, 2021 7th Sunday of Easter

John 17:6-19

⁶“I have told these men all about you. They were in the world, but then you gave them to me. Actually, they were always yours, and you gave them to me; and they have obeyed you.

⁷ Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, ⁸ for I have passed on to them the commands you gave me; and they accepted them and know of a certainty that I came down to earth from you, and they believe you sent me.

⁹“My plea is not for the world but for those you have given me because they belong to you.

¹⁰ And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me with everything else of yours, and so *they are my glory!*

¹¹ Now I am leaving the world, and leaving them behind, and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your own care—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are, with none missing.

¹² During my time here I have kept safe within your family all of these you gave me.^[a] I guarded them so that not one perished, except the son of hell, as the Scriptures foretold.

¹³“And now I am coming to you. I have told them many things while I was with them so that they would be filled with my joy.

¹⁴ I have given them your commands. And the world hates them because they don't fit in with it, just as I don't.

¹⁵ I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from Satan's power.

¹⁶ They are not part of this world any more than I am.

¹⁷ Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth.

¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world, ¹⁹ and I consecrate myself to meet their need for growth in truth and holiness.

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen

"In Between Time"

An ancient, fictional story tells of Jesus' ascension into heaven. He was met by the angel Gabriel who asked him, "Now that your work is finished, what plans have you made to ensure that the truth you brought to earth will spread throughout the world?"

Jesus answered, "I called some fishermen and tax-collectors to walk along with me as I did my Father's will."

"Yes, I know about them," said Gabriel, "but what other plans have you made? "

Jesus replied, "I taught Peter, James and John about the kingdom of God; I taught Thomas about faith; and all of them were with me as I healed and preached to the multitudes."

Gabriel began to lose patience. "Really now, all this is well and good, but surely you must have other plans to make sure your work was not in vain."

Jesus fixed Gabriel with a steady gaze and said with finality, "I have no other plans. I am depending on them!! "

Jesus said he was depending on the disciples to spread the message of love, mercy, and compassion to all the world. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and lo, I am with you to the close of the age." [Matthew 28:19] Even though Jesus was depending on the disciples, he would not leave them alone, for he promised them a helper, one who would come in strength to give them the needed power to spread His message.

The disciples knew all of this. In our church year, today is a time to stop, to ponder, to listen quietly, to pray, to feel, to experience, to wait and to wonder.

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, the day Jesus rose into heaven, and next Sunday is Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit of Jesus will visit the disciples with power. It is the birthday of the church.

Today however, is a waiting day, a day to reflect upon all that Jesus had said, taught, and done.

At this moment, the disciples must have felt insecure, confused, alone, lost, and were wondering what was going to happen next, if this was the end or just a beginning as Jesus had promised.

They had just seen Jesus rise into heaven. Even though their friend, their teacher, their Lord had gone away from them, it was nevertheless a glorious event, for now they were certain that Jesus was with the Father, that He was indeed the Son of God, and that Jesus and the Father were really one.

Without Jesus' physical presence, the disciples would now encounter a crossroad, a time 'in-between' when they had Jesus with them, and before the time when they would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, this was a awkward time for the disciples. It was a time for them to think about the words of Jesus, to dwell on his teaching, to recall his promises for them.

It is very appropriate that this reading from John's gospel is the one chosen by the Common Lectionary for today. If the disciples could recall that conversation with Jesus, their 'in-between' time wouldn't seem so frightening, nor would they feel so alone.

This was Jesus' high priestly prayer, the prayer that He prayed with his disciples before the events of Holy Week. He wanted to comfort them before the confusing events about to take place.

Notice how the disciples could draw strength, power, and assurance from that prayer. They would be with Jesus again - somehow.

Jesus says: "Holy Father, keep them in your own care, all those you have given me, so they will be united, just as we are, with none missing."

Jesus praying that the disciples would remain faithful would be very important for their 'in-between time.'

Jesus didn't want the disciples to take the easy road and go back to their fishing boats, back to what they knew, back to their comfort zone. Jesus wanted to empower the disciples with strength and to encourage them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Spirit.

The disciples had all the power from Jesus; they had their mission spelled out; they had the tools at hand... but they didn't know how to use them!

They were like a sail boat moored, bobbing up and down in the waves as the brisk wind makes the tree tops dance. The sailboat is clean and smooth, yet it hovers helplessly next to the dock.

The sails dance playfully in the power of the wind, but the boat does not move. Other ships cut across the lake with glee in the wind's silent grace, but the boat at the dock does not move.

Its sails shake in the wasted breeze. Its hardware rattles and bangs with eagerness to be used, but the boat drifts helplessly in the windswept water.

All the power is at hand. The wind drenches the boat with its force. The boat is ready.

But the boat still does not move because the person at the tiller does not have the wisdom to use either the power or the equipment. He does not have the knowledge to set the rigging, and does not even know how to direct the craft to receive all the glorious power around it."

The disciples were exactly like that. They didn't know how to set sail.

They needed the Pentecost experience; they needed the guidance of the Spirit; they needed the power of that spirit to get their boat sailing in the breeze. Jesus prayed that they would be drawn together while they waited to get started in their mission and that they would not lose faith.

There is something we can learn from this text and sequence of events, too. Jesus also prays for us to remain in the faith as we face the in-between times of our lives.

There are many times when you and I are not quite sure of our faith, not quite sure what is going to happen next, not quite sure what the future is going to hold for us. It is appropriate for us to recall these words of Jesus also. It is appropriate for us to know that even when we are confused, even if we don't know what is going to happen, even if we cannot get our boat sailing, we still have a relationship with Jesus. We still have faith. We can still cling to His promises and we can still rely on His redemption in our lives. We might feel in-between, but Jesus is still there for us.

It's in these times, when we go from one situation to another, not knowing what is going to happen next, or where we are going to find the strength to carry on, it's in these kinds of situations that the words of Jesus cry out to us.

"Remain in faith, believe in Me, I will give you the power to see you through, I will be with you."

As we face our 'in-between' times, and also in our everyday living, we know that Jesus is praying for us to remain faithful, and to cling to the truth of God's word.

We thank him for those prayers.

Amen