

May 16, 2021

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

Text: John 17:11-19

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

He is Risen!

Today is the Seventh Sunday of Easter, which is a kind of unusual day in terms of the Church Year. We celebrated the Ascension of our Lord on Thursday, so why are we still in Easter? Frankly, we didn't know what else to call it. We are in this strange in-between time – just like the disciples were – after Jesus ascended but before the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Our reading from Acts details how the Eleven chose a replacement for Judas from among those who had learned from Jesus and had witnessed the risen Christ. With two candidates put forth, they drew lots and Matthias became the twelfth Apostle, to complete the group of pastors that Jesus established.

Our Gospel reading for this day is from John 17, which is from the night Jesus was arrested. While He was with the Twelve in the upper room, Jesus prayed for all His disciples, what we call the “High Priestly Prayer”. It is called that because Jesus is praying as the intercessor between the Father and mankind in light of His coming passion. He is both sacrifice and High Priest and, as the writer to the Hebrews wrote, **“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.”** (Hebrews 5:7)

The section appointed for this year is core of the prayer, the intercession that Jesus asks on our behalf. He begins by saying that **“I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”** (v.14) This is not the only time Jesus says something like this, and yet it still surprises some people. *The world hates Christians?* It surprises people both inside and outside the Church because they have been lied to. They have been told that being a Christian is about being “nice”. If you are nice then you will never offend anyone and everyone will be your friend. How can the world hate you if you never say no, never take a stand, never say “This thing is wrong”? But Jesus never tells us to avoid offending people. The only way to avoid offending people is to hide God's Word. If you twist it and sugarcoat it and bow to popular opinion then yes, the world will like you and reward you. But if you boldly confess that Jesus is the Christ and that there is salvation in no one else... well, then... the battle lines are drawn. Yes, the world will hate you.

After this, Jesus proceeds with the actual petition, the thing He is asking for on our behalf. He said, **“I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”** (v.15-17) He asks the Father to protect us from

Satan and to sanctify us – that is, make us holy – in His truth. But what is truth? That’s the big question, isn’t it? In fact, less than a day later, when our Lord was dragged before Pontius Pilate to be tried, the governor asked Jesus the same thing: “What is truth?” Well, our Lord provided that answer for us: The Word of God is truth. It can be trusted. Those who trust the word of God cannot help but see that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah and that what He says comes from the Father. Jesus speaks with the Father’s authority. Jesus’ voice is the voice of God.

Jesus asks the Father to protect us from the evil one, our ancient adversary the devil. This is a very important proof for the existence of a personal devil. There are many liberal church bodies that teach that there is no individual known as the *diabolos* or the devil. But Jesus clearly believed in the devil because He knew him personally. The Son was active in his creation as an angel of light and was also present when Satan rebelled. While in the flesh, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, to no avail. Our Lord taught about the devil many times, as well as the existence of a real hell. So if the Son of God says there is a real fallen angel that is variously called the devil or Satan, we should probably believe Him. Or else, we don’t really know what truth is.

But if Jesus was going to the cross for us, why do we need protection from the devil? Hasn’t the devil been defeated already? That is the deeper question. Our Lord prayed this prayer with the cross in mind, but He also knew that the atonement for our sins was not the end of times. There were still millennia to come in which we, the members of His Church, would be striving against the trickery of the evil one. This is the “now and not yet” of the Christian life. Yes, you are a redeemed saint, but you are still a sinner. Yes, Jesus defeated death, but you will still die. The decisive battle may have been won on Golgotha, but we are still engaged in skirmishes with this insurgent army of demons. Their weapons are not guns and bombs, but lies and deception. Their goal is to pull us away from Christ, promising hidden knowledge, promising earthly power and fame. They are experts in their trade because they have had thousands of years to practice. On our own, we are outnumbered and outmatched.

But we are not on our own. Jesus’ prayer was heard and the Father does protect us from the evil one. In Revelation chapter 20, we are told that Satan is bound. Ever since the Ascension of our Lord and the war in heaven, Satan has been banished to our realm, the earthly realm, and his power here is limited. We cannot be snatched away from our Lord by force, nor can we be physically harmed. He and his beggar army are reduced to using parlor tricks and deception. These tricks are still effective, mind you, and for those outside of the Church, who do not believe in the Name of Jesus, these tricks are all it takes to get people to worship idols of the devil’s design. Idols like transgenderism and Marxism and just plain old wealth. But for those in Christ Jesus, there is nothing to fear. Let the devil snap at our heels: We cannot be harmed by him as long as we cling to Christ. His lies mean nothing to us.

Jesus did not ask the Father to take us out of the world. We have a job to do here, a mission given by the King Himself, to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the world. Not to convert the world, mind you, that is not up to us. But we are to be heralds of the King of Glory throughout every land, starting from... right here. What does a herald do but carry a message, holding high the banner of His Lord? Does that mean you will look different than the world? Yes, sometimes it does. We do not flaunt our bodies, trying to cause others to lust after us, like those who revel in sexuality. We do not deliberately offend by wearing t-shirts with nasty slogans on them or posting vile things online. We do not revel celebrate violence and greed and power. Yes, Christians can look different from the rest of the world, not because we are trying to stand out, but because are not swayed by the constantly changing winds of the world.

Another result is that Christians tend not to be famous and powerful. Yes, there are exceptions, but as a rule we aren't the cool kids in school, nor do we want to be. We want instead to lift up the banner of Christ, leading others to Him in everything we say and in everything we do. We are in the world but not of the world. That is how Jesus lived and that is how we are to live as well. We are in the world helping and loving our neighbor, forgiving and loving our enemies, sharing the Gospel day in and day out. Those are truly radical actions and they reveal that our hearts are different. They are different because they belong to Jesus.

The High Priestly Prayer teaches us that prayer is not a minor thing. Time and again we are told that Jesus prayed, often alone, often for long periods of time. He modeled what we should also do. Too often people pray the way they live their lives: Selfishly, looking inward and not outward. Jesus teaches us to pray for others, loving them with our prayers. We are commanded to pray, so let us pray every day, for those who don't know Christ, for those who are blinded by the lies of the evil one, for those who have wandered from the true faith.

The High Priestly Prayer is not merely an historical footnote: Jesus stands for us as our own High Priest every day, interceding for us. As sacrifice He paid for our transgression with His own precious blood. As priest, He stands between us and the Father. If we want to know God's truth, we look to Jesus. If we want to hear God's voice, we listen to Jesus. If we want to spend eternity with God, we receive His Sacraments, eating and drinking Jesus. Our task in the world is to follow Him wherever He leads, pointing to Him, praising Him and serving Him.

He is risen!

In Jesus name, Amen.

Rev. Schopp