

Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

John 17:1-21

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. 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. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

A Savior's Prayer **May 13, 2018**

Patsy Clairmont, author of the book, *God Uses Cracked Pots*, tells a story about her youngest son Jason. Little Jason has two goals in life. One is to have fun, and the other is to rest. He does both quite well. So it was no surprise when he was sent out to catch the bus one fall day and there was, a few moments later, a knock on the door. Mom flew to the door, jerked it open, and there stood Jason, looking up with his backpack and lunch box dragging the ground. Mom demanded, "What are you doing here?" He bravely said, "I've quit school." Mom said, "Quit school?" As she looked at her child in disbelief she tried to think of some motherly wisdom but all that came to mind at the time was "A stitch in time saves nine" and "Starve a cold and feed a fever." They didn't seem to fit the occasion, so she asked, "Why have you quit school?" Without hesitation, Jason said, "It's too

long, it's too hard, and it's too boring." This time she was equal to the task. She shot back, "you have just described life. Get on the bus!"

Over the last couple of weekends, there have been countless graduation ceremonies at our many colleges and universities for those kids who got back on the bus. Undergrads and grad students have spent the last 4-6 years studying and preparing for this moment. They have been mentored, tutored, examined, polished, and financially supported and now feel that they are ready to spread their wings and fly. A time of great joy and great anticipation and even great anxiety awaits them. Parents feel it too. They are so proud of their children and yet some will feel the deep pain of separation as their daughters and sons go out into the world to seek their fortune and fame. They want to earn money, have nice things, good paying jobs, public attention, and acclaim, maybe a family, maybe a house, all the things that our culture tells them will make them feel fulfilled and successful. That's what many college graduates hope to achieve. And parents worry about them and pray for them.

There is also another group of graduates who will be graduating from seminaries across the country, who hope to achieve something perhaps a bit different. They too have studied and prepared. They have studied theology, history, sociology, biblical studies, preaching, pastoral care or congregational care, Christian education, as well as the wonderful topic, Polity! They are filled with the same anxiety and excitement as they consider what it will be like to go out into the world. But perhaps, unlike others, they go out as ones who are not of the world. They are ones who go out to serve others, to remind others that they are God's children and that the things of this world will not bring the kind of happiness that they truly seek or need. That unity with God and one another is something that is worthy of their lives. That loving one another and service to others is the reason we are here, which is a source of deep happiness. And Jesus tells his disciples that very thing as they are gathered together one last time at the Passover meal they shared. Maybe this is the disciple's baccalaureate service with graduation coming on Pentecost.

Jesus, as we know, has just washed their feet. He has told them that he is the vine and they are the branches. He tells them that he chose them and that they are loved and precious to him. His love abides in them if they love one another. That they are his friends. And now as the evening wears down and the lights are flickering low, he prays for them. He offers them up to God as a living sacrifice and his words penetrate our hearts. It is the last prayer he will share with them this side of heaven.

In some ways, this prayer sounds like something your parents would say to you on their death bed if they were able. "Love one another. Don't be fooled by the temptations of the world. Leave the office early. Remember the good things I taught you, even if I wasn't perfect. Live lives of purpose and meaning and always lean on and turn to, the God who loves you and created you. Go out and share the gifts of that love. Be one with one another and with God. Don't be afraid. And remember that wherever I am, I will be praying for you." Wow! What a sendoff!

Some of you have had the deep joy of having your parents pray for you as a child. Some of you have fond memories of mom or dad tucking you into bed and praying with you and teaching you how to pray. I regret that that is not one of my memories. How powerful that must have been for you and I can honestly say I envy you.

It reminds me of that story about the Rabbi who said to a precocious six-year-old boy, 'So your mother says your prayers for you each night? That's very commendable. What does she say?' The little boy replied, 'Thank God he's in bed!'

But what comfort it gives us to hear that Jesus prays, not only for his disciples, but for us as well, and I think the biblical story would suggest that he continues to pray for us still. But where he is going we cannot go yet and he has more to say about that.

Our lectionary options this week were to either focus on the ascension, which is why I read the Acts passage, or today's reading from John. Somehow for me, they have a common theme. Yes, Jesus has ascended to his heavenly father, returning to the glory that was his from before time, and we rejoice in that. But the comments from the angels are what really gets me when they say, "Why are you looking up to heaven?" Jesus will return basically when he is good and ready and he will return the same way he left, so stop standing around looking up and get to work. Which is also what I think Jesus is telling his disciples as he prays for them when he says, I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to send them out into the world as those, who like him, are not of the world, but in the world. Again, basically saying, stop thinking about going to heaven and get back to work.

Now there has often been a culture within the Christian community that all one has to do is come to church, believe the right things, say the right words, confess your sins, and get your ticket to heaven punched and then go back to living the way you were before. "No worries, I'm going to heaven. No reason to care about this world because we won't be here that long." We have books and movies that do their best to scare people into believing that this is the most important thing. Movies like the *Left Behind* series that focus on what will happen when all those who believe are lifted up to heaven and all that remain behind will endure the devil and his minions. Scaring the literal hell out of everyone.

But it seems to me that Jesus isn't saying that at all. Jesus is saying, "You are chosen, you are justified, you are sanctified, to go into the world and continue the work that God has begun in you. And yes, I will see you in heaven but heaven is not the point. Loving one another and serving others is the point, and I suggest you get about doing it." To be sanctified is to be set apart for a holy purpose and that purpose is God's calling in your life. Jesus said, "He glorified God on earth by finishing the work that God gave him to do." This is how we glorify God. We can't be satisfied with being forgiven and freed by God's grace just so we can enjoy eternity. We are called to be so much more than that in the world. A world that is often at odds with the heart of God.

David Lose in his commentary said, "This world is captive to a spirit alien to God's spirit. It is animated by a sense of scarcity instead of abundance, fear instead of courage, and selfishness instead of sacrificial love. Jesus -- the one who came to bring abundant life, who does not run away in the face of danger, and lays down his life for the sheep -- offers an alternative spirit and reality. This is the reason the world hates Jesus and will hate those who follow him. So Jesus doesn't pray that it will be easy, but rather that God will support the disciples amid their challenges and that they will be one in fellowship with each other and with Jesus and the Father through the Spirit.

But Jesus doesn't only pray for his disciples back then, he also prays for us right now. That's right, Jesus, on the night before his death, prays for us. And what does he pray for? The same things -- that we may find God's support and encouragement and that we may be one in fellowship with each other and God. And, of course, these two things go together -- as we gather together to hear God's Word and to remind each other of God's promises, we are not only drawn together in deeper fellowship but also find the strength and courage to face the challenges that come from living in the world and bearing witness to the alien and alternative gospel of grace, abundance, courage, and love that is ours in and through Jesus."

When we think of the Lord's Prayer, we, of course, think of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and that we pray each week. But there's a way in which this prayer today gives us *another* Lord's Prayer, the prayer our Lord prayed—and is still praying—for us: that we might find the strength we need as we live and serve in this world, even with eyes on the next. And that, I think, is unbelievably cool.

I want to leave you with a short poem by Ann Weems that helped me give context to how we live in this world but are not of this world. I love her thoughts. The poem is called, *Eyes Still Filled*, and it goes like this

On Tennessee summer evenings
we would lie on our backs,
the stars still hanging in our eyes,
and we would wonder...
wonder what was going on up there
among the stars...

If we stared long enough,
the stars would lift us to them,
and we would float,
face to face with the stars
in the entranceway of the home of God.

When our mother called us to come in
because the late hour,
the spell was broken,
and we would fall back to earth,
where our backs itched from the grass
and our thirst was powerful,
but our eyes...
our eyes were still filled
with the glory of God.

Jesus prays for us still, thanks be to God! And he prays that we will have the courage and love to continue to be who he has called us to be in the world...this world, in this time, and this place. So, look up occasionally, to remember where you are from, and where you are going, and fall back to earth, with eyes filled with glory, and then get back on the bus! Amen.