

Isaiah 33:5-6, 17, 20-22

5 The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness.

6 And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, *and* strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD *is* his treasure.

17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle *that* shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken.

21 But there the glorious LORD *will be* unto us a place of broad rivers *and* streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.

22 For the LORD *is* our judge, the LORD *is* our lawgiver, the LORD *is* our king; he will save us.

JOHN 17

The Prayer of Jesus

1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

2 as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.

11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as *we are*.

12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 that they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

26 And I have declared unto them thy name and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Sermon
Sunday After the Ascension

5/10/24

Introduction

As I read our second lesson from John, it reminded me of my experiences in one of the classes I engaged in. A required class, I was not sure what to expect when I signed up for Contemporary Evangelism. When I think of evangelism, I think of those television preachers or huge mega churches, a far cry from the little Episcopal church I grew up in. It always rang a little wrong to me, asking for money in return for God's "favor". In the past, I have always felt a little uncomfortable with people who I don't know wanting to talk about things that are deeply personal, like religion.

As I looked over the syllabus, my fears were growing. I saw that the crux of the class was learning how to share the Gospel with others, especially those you do not know. My anxiety grew and I thought, Ok here is the class I am going to have the most trouble with. My first assignment was to find someone who I could serve and, if appropriate, tell them about Jesus. People in my class were going down to the homeless camps, setting up booths, and really getting after it. I was really not sure what to do.

One day, while I was driving home, I passed the house of a person I used to work with years ago. I knew he had passed away and his widow still lived there. I saw that the fall leaves had fallen and were making a mess all over the yard and driveway. I heard that small voice inside me telling me that this was where I needed to serve. So, I pulled over and knocked on the door. I had met his wife before so after a few minutes of

conversation about raking her leaves she opened the garage door, and I found a rake. In about 30 minutes I had the pile sorted and into a yard debris can. She came out and we started to chat again. In a friendly manner she asked me why I was doing it for her. I told her I had worked closely with her husband and thought she could use the help. I segued into a conversation about church and my studies. I asked her if she believed in God, and she said she didn't really. In fact, she said, she had never been to church or really knew anything about Jesus. I asked her if I could tell her about Jesus and answer any questions and she nodded. In a pile of leaves, I shared with her the Gospel of Jesus Christ and why he died for our sins. She didn't interrupt and seemed to listen intently. It was during the holiday season, so I asked her if she had a Bible. She didn't so I asked if I could bring her one. Later that week I dropped off a Bible for her and told her that there are 25 chapters in the Gospel of Luke and if she read one a day in December, she would know the real story of Christmas. She thanked me and said she would read it.

In this class, I ended up sharing the gospel with a homeless man, a friend of mine for over 20 years, my neighbor, and a lady who was outside Fred Meyer. It became a lot easier the more I did it. Jesus commands us in Matthew 28, "to go therefore and make disciples of all nations". It is our job and the job of the church to bring as many people to know Christ as we can. This experience brought me out of my comfort zone, and I know I was glorifying God in the process.

Body

The New Testament lesson for today, John: 17, is often called "Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer". It includes our Lord's

intercession for His disciples whom He is leaving behind, and for those of us who have become part of the Apostolic community through the teaching and preaching of the Church. It is, in a sense, the first prayer for the whole state of Christ's church. It is not a prayer for the world but rather a prayer for the Church.

The prayer is somewhat long, not at all like Jesus' public discourses, which are organized and compact. But as is the case with many priests, prayer and preaching are two different forms of communication.

Jesus begins by summarizing His ministry on earth. He rehearses His accomplishments, not with the idea of boasting but rather with the idea of offering them to the Father. In the process, Jesus gives us an insight into what He Himself considers to be the most important aspects of His mission.

Everyone may have their own ideas about the most significant accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Some cite His moral teachings and His challenges to the prevailing culture. Perhaps one thinks of His apparent pacifism and non-violent attitude. Others may cite His association with the poor and the outcasts or His willingness to forgive. According to His own judgment, here are the most important things that Jesus has done.

The first thing is that He glorified God:

"I have glorified thee on the earth."

The second thing is that He revealed the nature of God, not to everyone, but to the Apostles:

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world”

The third thing is that He secured the faith and obedience of that community:

“I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from thee and they have believed that thou didst send me.”

So, the establishment of the Church, is actually the most important achievement in the ministry of Jesus, according to His own assessment. It is that achievement that He offers to the Father in the hours just before His death.

Then, having offered the fruits of His labor, Jesus asks the Father to bless that offering. Offering the fruits of one's labor to God and asking Him to bless those fruits is the essential action of the Eucharist. What Jesus is offering here is the body that will continue on earth after His own physical body has been offered on the Cross. In other words, He is offering us as a living sacrifice, and asking God to bless us.

The first blessing that Jesus asks for us is that we may be one in the same way that He and the Father are one.

The persons of the Trinity are one and yet each is unique in character. They are equal but not identical. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not interchangeable. They always act in concert because each of them constantly gives Himself completely to the others.

A good example of this kind of unity on earth to is the bond of Holy Matrimony. A man and his wife become one flesh but remain two distinct individuals. They act in concert because they contribute their uniqueness completely each to the other. Anything one achieves is the achievement of both. Anything that hurts one hurts both. In concept, that is how marriage is supposed to work. And that's how the Church is supposed to work as well.

Christ prays for those that are his. Thou gavest them me, as sheep to the shepherd, to be kept; as a patient to the physician, to be cured; as children to a tutor, to be taught: thus he will deliver up his charge. It is a great satisfaction to us, in our reliance upon Christ, that he, all he is and has, and all he said and did, all he is doing and will do, are of God. He prays that we may be one as He and the Father are one.

The second blessing that Jesus desires for His Church is protection from evil:

“I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil [one].”

Christ does not pray that they might be rich and great in the world, but that they might be kept from sin, strengthened for their duty, and brought safe to heaven. The prosperity of the soul is the best prosperity. He did not pray that his disciples should be removed out of the world, that they might escape the rage of men, for they had a great work to do for the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind. But he prayed that the Father would keep them from the evil, from being corrupted by the world, the

remains of sin in their hearts, and from the power and craft of Satan.

As long as the Church is in the world, it will be subject to the same pressures, the same risks, and the same problems as any other institution. We are human and the Church is comprised of sinners and is constantly looking to add more sinners to its membership. With that in mind, it is reasonable to expect that there will be scandals and arguments and that the Church will fall short of the vision that Jesus has for it. But Jesus has asked the Father to preserve us in spite of all that.

To keep us from the evil one is not to keep us from contact with evil or from being victimized by evil but simply to keep us from falling under his control.

The history of the Church demonstrates that this prayer has been answered. The Church has survived persecution, internal corruption, heresy and schism, neglect, worldly affluence, worldly poverty, and public scandal. Yet, the Church continues, propped up by the power of God.

“The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

Finally, Jesus asks that the Church may be blessed with everlasting joy. The source of this joy is Christ Himself, whose triumph and glory He desires to share with His bride. Those who have died with Him will rise with Him. Those who have shared His tribulations will share His joy. Not only the Apostles, but all who believe in Jesus because of the Apostolic witness, are to receive these blessings. That is what Jesus asks for His Church.

Conclusion

The book of Hebrews calls Jesus our great high priest. As I said before, people have called this chapter in St. John's Gospel "the High Priestly Prayer". It is a prayer of intercession, and it is also a prayer of consecration. It is not a one-time prayer but an ongoing activity of the risen Christ.

It is that ongoing act of consecration that makes the Church holy in spite of all our human defects. And it is that consecration, reflected in the Holy Eucharist, that enables the church not only to survive but ultimately to prevail. I pray that we, as members of the Universal Church, will continue to spread the good word and bring others to know Christ. These are dark times we are in, and we all need the message of redemption to remind us of the love of Christ and what lies ahead.

To the only wise God, OUR SAVIOR
Be glory, majesty, dominion, and power
Both now and forever, Amen