

## Lord, Teach Us to Pray...

By: Meagan McLaughlin

May 16, 2021. Today's sermon is on the prayer Jesus offers in John 17 for his disciples before his arrest, and how it is remarkably vulnerable and intimate.

Readings: [John 17:6-19](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

As we are coming to the end of the Easter Season this year, I've been thinking back to February of last year, when we were hearing only whispers of what was to come. March 22nd, we held our first Zoom worship, thinking it would be a few weeks, a couple of months at most. We had no idea at that time the losses this year would bring, the trauma we might experience, and we certainly had no idea how long it would last.

Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, and Lent and Easter again have passed since we last worshipped in person. And here we are on the 7th Sunday of Easter, and our gospel for today comes from John 17, before Jesus died. In fact, the prayer we hear Jesus pray today are the last words Jesus had for his disciples in the Gospel of John prior to his arrest. Although they don't realize it, as Jesus is praying this prayer, the disciples are about to have their whole world turned upside down. They don't know that Jesus, who they have been following for three years, who they believed would free them all from Roman occupation, is going to be arrested and die a horrific death. They don't know that the next 24 hours will bring an abrupt change to everything they thought they understood about how things were going to be and what they thought Jesus was going to do.

The disciples, not knowing that this would be the last meal they would eat with their friend and mentor, had no context for Jesus's words, and I can imagine them listening, turning to one another, and whispering to each other, "What on earth is Jesus talking about? What does he mean, he's no longer in the world? He's sitting right here. Of course he belongs here. We have work to do. We have plans."

We listen to these words some 2,000 years later, and knowing what was going to happen, we can see what Jesus is trying to do here — offer comfort, reassurance, and hope for the days to come, turning his beloveds over to God for the journey ahead. As Mr. Jesse pointed out, that is something that never changes. John's gospel doesn't often reveal Jesus' human vulnerability the way the other gospels do. John passes over the agony in the garden, and does everything he can to describe Jesus as fully in control, subject to no one, even choosing for himself the moment of his death.

The prayer Jesus offers for his disciples before his arrest, however, is remarkably vulnerable, and intimate. Jesus tells God as he prays that he can't be with his disciples anymore. And as often as we see God's expansiveness, in this moment Jesus is praying not for everyone, but for his beloveds. His apostles. Jesus knows the horror, grief, and danger that his death will bring for those closest to him. And Jesus asks God to be with them, to protect them, knowing that he is called to move on, and trusting that ultimately, God is our source. Debie Thomas writes in her blog this week, "'I am asking,' Jesus says. How surprising is it that God incarnate spends his final moments with his friends in humble supplication on their behalf? Knowing full well the trials and terrors that lie ahead, he prays into uncertainty. He hopes into doubt. He trusts into danger."

When we think of Jesus teaching us to pray, we of course think first of the Lord's Prayer, that clear,

beautiful, profession of praise, confession, thanksgiving, and request that we and Christians around the world pray every week. In these final moments of Jesus's life on earth, Jesus is once more teaching us to pray — all of his beloveds, but in this moment, especially us. You. You and I are invited to receive Jesus' prayer for us. To know that God is with us. And as Mr. Jesse pointed out, that that's one thing that never changes. To claim the promise of joy and unity and trust in the midst of things we can't begin to control or even understand.

As hard as this last year has been, as unprepared as we were for all that has happened, God has been with us. What would have been unimaginable last February has become in many ways comfortable and familiar to us, as we have settled into rhythms of life in a pandemic.

And now, things are changing again, as happens in life. We feel excitement, curiosity, and anxiety and fear as we make decisions for ourselves and our families about how and when to return to in-person activities. We are learning that even something we long deeply for, gathering together with people we love dearly and have missed this last year, is not easy, and can be stressful in ways we find surprising. New life is coming as families anticipate the birth of babies in the coming months. Grief circles back, as we who have grieved the deaths of loved ones on our own now have opportunities to gather together with others who share our losses.

And today we celebrate and bless our graduates, who have navigated their final years of high school and college in the pandemic, and are prepared in unique ways for the joys and challenges to come. Graduates, Jesus' prayer is for you especially today.

As we step into the uncertainties, the new life, the grief, the joy, the anxiety, today we take time to let Jesus's prayer settle on us like a blanket. Rest in the promise that God will be present even in the face of the challenges that come. Settle in the joy of knowing that God's love cannot be erased, as Mr. Jesse pointed out. Embrace the unity that comes from knowing that God has given us into a community that embodies this love, through all the challenges of life, even in the face of a pandemic. As Mr. Jesse pointed out, we are here for each other. We have been, and we continue to be. Let go in the face of uncertainty. Ask that God be with us. Trust that God will take care of us and those we love, no matter what happens. Today, we sit with Jesus, and say once again, "Teach us to pray."

Amen.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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