

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Seventh Sunday of Easter - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Pslam 1

I John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

05/12/2024

### Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus prayed:] 6“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. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for 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. 9I 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. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11And 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.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

### Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Say... What?

Christ is Risen! Good morning! As I read through the Gospel reading for today I felt a little overwhelmed. It reminded me of the 2000 film *Memento*. Hard to follow, confusing, and an interweaving of stories that made my brain hurt. It was directed by Christopher Nolan, and if you think his later work is hard to understand, you should give this a watch. If my goal today was to unpack every confusing section of the text, we would be here for about the same amount of time it would take to watch a few of Nolan's films, so I am going with a different approach, together we will take a step back and look at the story as a whole and see if we can put together the larger narrative. But in order to do that, we first need to discuss the many different timelines and contexts we encounter on a given Sunday.

The first is the timeline the story finds itself within the context of the Gospel of John. We pick up our story in the 17th chapter, near the end of the story. We have arrived at the end of what scholars call the Final Discourse. This takes place before his arrest, and execution, but after he has gone through a lengthy final teaching lesson on the core of his message. He wraps up three years of ministry in one evening's intense lecture.

Jesus is preparing to go, which makes sense for why it was chosen for our second context. Every year the church follows a liturgical calendar that sees us follow the ministry of Jesus and celebrate the many major events of his life. We find ourselves at the very end of the season of Easter, that's right, in case you needed to be reminded, Easter is a season, not just one day! But our text today is one week before the day of Pentecost. In fact, this past Thursday was the Ascension of Our Lord, the day we celebrate Christ's return to the Father and the end of bodily ministry here on earth. So right after Jesus has left, and right before the disciples are equipped with the Holy Spirit, we find the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

But that liturgical, or church calendar, isn't the only other context either! There are many more, but the final one for us is the context of the people reading the story today! The stories in the Gospel are from 2,000 years ago and while we might celebrate the season of Easter, we know how the story ends. Regardless of how we might be "re-living" the text, we look at it through our own histories and experiences.

So, let's dive even deeper and see how these stories might interweave and create a new and wonderful story!

Let's look again at the Gospel context. We don't have the traditional institution of the Lord's Supper in John. For the writer of this Gospel it was important that we see Jesus as the sacrificial lamb of Passover. So where in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus celebrates that most important of Jewish holidays in the upper room, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is arrested before the Passover, and literally dies the afternoon of that holiest of days. Instead, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, an event we celebrate on Maundy Thursday. After he does this he goes into one last teaching session, called the Last Discourse by scholars, where he boils down the past three years of lessons into one final message. As he finishes, he begins the prayer we read today. It can be easy to blur the contexts, and we often read into this story our own selves as the ones that Jesus is praying for, but the context in our lesson is clear that Jesus is praying specifically and only for the disciples. He prays for other believers right after our story, but today's lesson is just for his very closest of friends. He is preparing them for his death, for the reality of life without him. For three years they have followed him, he was the only thing they knew, and soon that was all going to change.

Liturgy is a fancy church word that literally means "the work of the people." It's what we use in the church to discuss the actions and parts of worship. The context of the liturgical calendar is as we said, after the ascension and right before Pentecost. So the lesson becomes a very similar one. Looking at it from this lens we are reading a story that is once again preparing the disciples for life without Jesus. He is leaving them, and on Pentecost they will begin in earnest the impossible task of

spreading this story to the four corners of the world. Were I a disciple, I would want a prayer too.

Which brings the story to us. While “God is always the subject of the active verb,” it is understandable to wonder how we fit into the story. Oftentimes this is the hardest part for a preacher. I have books upon books about the biblical and liturgical contexts to help me put things together, but the congregational context is one that is ever changing. But I think the story is equally appropriate. Over the last several months we have been working to discern where God is guiding St. Paul’s. But we find ourselves in the midst of great change too. Like the biblical story we come together in the midst of major religious and life events. Like the liturgical story we know that soon God will set us free to go out and share the Gospel message in new and amazing ways.

It’s funny, one of the major threads that runs throughout all of this is just how scary it can all be. Before Jesus’ death the disciples could tell that something was changing, they weren’t sure what that meant, but they knew. And after his ascension they knew that this next step would be hard. Knowing what their mission was didn’t change the fear that no doubt crossed their minds. We too stand at a place and time where I KNOW God is calling the church to wonderful and amazing things. That doesn’t change how terrifying it still is!

Maybe that’s why Jesus prayed for them. In the midst of fear and uncertainty God shows up and prays. It’s a reminder to take a breath. To be still. The world is a scary place, but when we can gather and pray, things seem more manageable. Sometimes it’s just the simple act of knowing that we aren’t in this alone that can get

us through it. It's a vulnerable experience to name our fears, and by gathering together, being one body, we work to dispel that fear. Arm in arm, hand in hand, baptized and fed for the work that God calls us to take up. Amen.