

## Seventh Sunday of Easter - May 24, 2020 - Saint David's, Halifax NS

Readings: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; I Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

### Call to Worship:

The Lord is risen!

**The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord.

**Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel;  
and whose power is in the skies.**

Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;  
he gives power and strength to his people.

**Blessed be God!** [*Ps. 68:32, 34-35*]

### Prayer:

**Mighty God, by your power you raised Jesus Christ to rule over us.**

**We thank you that he alone commands our lives,  
and gives us freedom to love the world.**

**Glory to you for the gift of his life!**

**Glory to you for his saving death!**

**Glory to you for Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our risen Lord,  
now and forever. Amen.**

### I Peter 5:6-7

<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

### John 17:1-11

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, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. <sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> 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.

## Reflection:

By the time John wrote his Gospel, Jesus' followers had already learned that the new life in Christ is not always easy. Disagreement within, persecution without, caused pain, suffering, discouragement, even despair.

So John recalls Jesus' farewell words to his disciples just prior to his own suffering, including the prayer that Jesus offers on behalf of his friends. Jesus asks God to protect them, to be with them so that they know they belong to God and to one another.

And he doesn't just pray for his first disciples but "also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." That includes you and me and all of our sisters and brothers in every time and place!

I don't know about you but I find the assertion that Jesus prays for us both moving and immensely comforting. Like the gracious words of pardon in Paul's Letter to the Romans:

Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, *Christ prays for us.* [Rom. 8:34]

There is the acknowledgement in that same chapter of Romans that "we do not know how to pray as we ought" and then those great words of assurance, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; . . . that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." Wonderful!

God surely invites our prayers, our conversation, but when we are speechless for whatever reason, the Spirit takes over.

"And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." [Rom. 8:27]

This all fits with what we read of God's lovingkindness in Psalm 68:

"God is father of orphans, and protector of widows. God gives the desolate a home to live in; and provides for the needy. . . ."

"Cast all your anxiety on [God]," writes Peter, "because he cares for you."

What difference does it make to us to know that God cares for us, that Jesus prays for us, that the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words?

Surely it eases our fear, comforts our souls, lifts our spirits and bolsters our courage.

We pray for one another and for ourselves, especially in these days of stress and distress. That is one important way in which we provide mutual care.

But in and through and over our prayers are woven the prayers of Jesus for all of us. When words fail us, when anxiety cripples us, when uncertainty wears us down, Christ prays for us. That amazing truth is like a divine hug, embracing us in God's unending love.

Jesus sends us into the world "to permeate all of life with the compassion of God." [*Living Faith* 9.1.3] That takes a lot of wisdom and a lot of energy, qualities which we do not always possess in great measure and which in these pandemic days sometimes seem hard to come by. But Jesus prays for us, prays for the church,

that we may be united and strengthened in the knowledge

that we are in this together,  
that we are one body in Christ,  
that in our various ways and circumstances as we seek to worship and serve in  
strange new and wonderful ways, God is with us.

Jesus prays that in this heartbreaking, frightened, fragmented world, we will always see ourselves as belonging to God and that we will realize our bond with one another as God's beloved children.

It is about knowing we are loved, that the world is loved. Such knowledge enables, empowers, inspires us to be bearers of life-giving hope, as Christ calls us to be in good times and in bad.

I came across a prayer by a minister in London, England in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century named William Orchard. His book of prayers called *The Temple* published 100 years ago were written for evening services that attracted crowds from all walks of life and reached out especially to people struggling with the complexities of life and faith. Time may have changed the language somewhat but in our own current struggle with complexity, these words convey the reality of our yearning and our need:

O God, the Source of our being, the Goal of our desire, and the Guide of these our pilgrim days: we have turned aside from the ceaseless fret of life that we may think of all it means for us. We would stay for a moment the noisy shuttle of time, that we may watch the pattern it is weaving. We would hush our busy thoughts, that we might learn in silence the mysteries of our being.

Beyond the clouds that veil our sight, we feel the sun must still be shining; behind the tangle of human affairs some mighty purpose working, beneath the strange yearnings of our souls there moves Thyself, awful, vast and holy. Gleams of purpose have visited our minds, the sense of some great destiny accompanies all our thoughts. We have reason for believing Thou art nearer than we think.

O God, our Life, our Hope, our Strength: leave us not. Make us sure of Thee. Disclose Thy purposes. Make Thy way straight before us.

"We have reason for believing Thou art nearer than we think."

Yes, we do. Jesus Christ prays for us, holding us close with love and grace that never end.

Amen. Thanks be to God!

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**Prayer:**

Gracious God, you desire unity for your people in the world, and unity between heaven and earth. We thank you for drawing us together as a community of faith, united in your love even in times when it is hard to gather. Thank you for revealing your nature and purpose in Jesus Christ. We praise you for his compassionate life, his faithful death, his triumphant resurrection and his glorious exaltation. In him we find true life and are raised to true humanity. Thank you for every opportunity of learning and growth. Thank you for Jesus who prays for us and for the Spirit who intercedes when we lose the words.

Come, Lord Jesus, to all who are sad.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to all who are in pain.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to the dying.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to all who suffer injustice or discrimination.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to all who want to know you,  
or want to know you better.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to all who work for peace.  
Come, Lord Jesus, to all your people everywhere.

Equip us to witness to your promise of resurrection life as we serve you in the world.

God of all generations, we praise you for all your servants, who, having been faithful to you on earth, now live with you in your nearer presence. Keep us in fellowship with them, until we meet with all your children in the joy of your eternal kingdom.

Eternal God, by raising Jesus from the dead you proclaimed his victory and by his ascension, you declared him Lord of all. Lift up our hearts to heaven where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.  
Amen.*