

Christ Episcopal Church
2 Emerson Street
East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

7 Easter (B)

May 13, 2018

DRAFT

8 AM and 10 AM homilies

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“God is our protector”

The Holy Gospel according to

John 17:6-19

Looking up to heaven, Jesus prayed, “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. While 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. But 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. I 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. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Holy Father, protect us and make us one with you as you are one with us. Amen.

The Gospel writer is giving us a special insight on how Jesus thought and prayed. My own concept of how God the Son spoke to God the Father is probably more in the realm of the tweedles that the old internet would make when one computer was connecting with another computer. Some of us remember those days.

We would probably not be able to interpret exactly how the Trinity communicates within themselves—some have referred to it as a ‘dance’, a perichoresis, since the Holy Spirit, although unnamed in today’s Gospel, the Holy Spirit is how Jesus communicates with his Heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit is how we here today can hear Jesus’ word of comfort to us. There is a sort of a dance going on between the Son and the Father that is conjoined with the Holy Spirit.

But in this sacred prayer we hear that Jesus wants us to know how much he cares for us and how much he cared for those disciples of his a few days before he would be crucified. Jesus

was placing full responsibility for the Gospel into the hands of those men and women who were travelling and supporting him in his earthly journey of ministry. And Jesus was protecting his investment by asking for his Heavenly Father's attention to those few Jesus had chosen to take the Good News to the entire world after his death, resurrection, and Ascension.

We today are, in liturgical terms, about midway between when Jesus ascended into heaven and the time when the Holy Spirit fell on those 120 praying in the upper room on Pentecost when the tongues of fire descended on them and they began to prophesy in

understandable tongues of a multitude of foreign languages with an ability they did not have previously. Next Sunday we will hear of the amazing story of the first Pentecost. We are today in the church year situated in between the going up of Jesus and the coming down of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells his Father, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine”, letting the disciples know that their true allegiance and protection would be from the Father ‘who art in heaven’, because Jesus’ physical and spiritual presence would soon be with his Father in heaven.

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Janet's six-year-old son, Jason, had declared his independence and stated that from now on he was old enough to put himself to bed. Janet lingered close by, but out of sight, to be sure he was tucked in properly. As Janet stood in the hall outside Jason's room one night, she heard him murmuring what she soon realized were his prayers. He reviewed his day and requested some good events for the next day. When he even reeled off the names of those he wanted God to be sure to remember, Janet had to smile.

Janet realized that their evening routine of many years and all those early Sunday mornings spent in Sunday school had paid off. But that touching moment was somewhat muted by her

feeling that she was intruding on a most intimate conversation between her son and God. It was as if she were overhearing something she was not meant to share in. But what she overheard were some of the most poignant and reassuring words to come from her child's lips, and her heart filled with gratitude.

When we overhear the high priestly prayer of Jesus in the garden, we have a similar feeling. We are listening in on one of the most intimate moments ever recorded in scripture.

<https://www.sermonsuite.com/emphasis-preaching-journal/janets-six-year-old-son>

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The mothers among us may remember when they had to let their children go off to college, or summer camp, or to grandma's. There is a sense of fear and trepidation but also a feeling of how much joy their children would have at grandma's or at summer camp or at college. Yet there is still a sense of helplessness, that maybe we didn't tell our kids enough about how to handle all the challenges they would be facing during their short or long time away. It is not easy being a parent. The challenges of the world can be both alluring and frightening and threatening; how can anyone anticipate what their child will be facing? That is when earnest prayer happens, I suspect. I have acquaintances

who think that I as a priest am only concerned with praying to the empty clouds above, that there is no God, no heavenly Father; but I wonder how their own mothers treated them at the time they went off from home. Was it only a sense of relief? Or were there anxious moments when they remember their own first times away from home?

Can we picture what Jesus must have felt when he knew he was not only about to be horribly disgraced and murdered right in front of the disciples' eyes, followed shortly by a miraculous resurrection that would only last for a few weeks before Jesus made his final journey out of the universe, out of our physical reality,

away to a place we humans could only dimly imagine. And at this point in John's Gospel Jesus was leaving all his work in their hands and in our hands. What would we be feeling?

Each time a pastor leaves their flock, the same issues pertain. How will they survive? How will they carry on? Will they carry on? And so forth. The best we transitional ministers can do is to show others how much power they really have, that they are indeed competent to do the work that is needed in their community, and that God will not be leaving them in any manner or form. God does not leave us bereft.

The advantage of being 'church' is that we are doing 'church' together. We are the church;

we are the people called by God to serve Christ in this place and at this time. However, each time will be unique, just as no place stays exactly the same. In the community from which I retired, almost the entire community became Latino in the decade following the fall of the World Trade Towers because of the massive building boom in Jersey City that displaced thousands of Hispanic folk due to steeply rising rents and housing costs. And much of that community picked up and moved west down a limited access four lane highway less than ten miles to our community. One of the Episcopal church planters challenged us to be aware of how our community was changing by doing a

‘walk around’ of the church building. Within three blocks of that church almost every establishment spoke both Spanish and English, Spanish being the predominate language. And here we were, about the only English speaking group around except for three or four other English churches who also were scratching their heads and trying to figure out how their community was changing and how to relate to the new arrivals. It is easy to be lured into thinking our community is the same now as it was twenty years ago, but in fact, most eastern seaboard communities are now in significant flux; it may not be a language difference like the one we had at my church, but oftentimes the

economic differences are striking. The older the church, the more changes it has probably seen over its history. The key is to figure out how to respond and adept to the spiritual needs of those new people around it. Where once there were big homes, there now may be multifamily dwellings, and so on. And many of the new folks have no interest in Jesus Christ unless we somehow make him attractive to their needs.

In this High Priestly prayer in our Gospel lesson for today, we hear in John Chapter 17 that Jesus was setting a standard for his disciples' future needs, a standard that hopefully we can follow. He outlines four issues:

One: Jesus tells his Father that he has given the disciples the knowledge and understanding that his Father had given him, and Jesus affirms that the disciples have come to believe that what Jesus taught was indeed directly from his Father. Two, Jesus then expresses his hope that his Heavenly Father will protect those he had been given: “protect them in your Name”, Jesus says. Then, three, Jesus notes that the world will ‘hate’ them; isn’t that a bit scary? “The world has hated them because they do not belong to the world.” And, four, finally Jesus asks his Heavenly Father to ‘sanctify’ the disciples, give them a sense of God’s sacredness and truth and presence. God’s truth gives Jesus’ disciples

holiness, sacredness, as Jesus himself was sanctified by his Heavenly Father. We here are covered by the wings of God overarching us, keeping us safe, until the time we are to go to the Father just as Jesus makes his journey back out of the universe we know and back into heaven where Jesus resided before the beginning of time with his Heavenly Father. We are already living a life of sacredness if we listen to and follow Christ's word, his commandments, and his truth.

This holy prayer of Jesus keeps us safe in the knowledge that God has charge of us, that God indeed looks over us, and that we are holy people following Christ's way.

One writer expresses it this way: “We are to tell the world about the tree (the crucifixion), the tomb (Jesus’ burial), and the trumpet (when Christ returns at the Last Day)”—the tree, the tomb, and the trumpet. We are to proclaim the good news wherever we are and whenever we go out to people living in a troubled world. Rev. Peter L. Steinke said: “The gospel is God's remedy for a futile, decaying, and groaning world ... He's got the whole world in his hands, and on his mind, too, when he inserts the resurrection of Christ into history. The resurrection is God's will to liberate a decaying world from death: the resurrection is not our answer for our longing. The resurrection is

God's answer to his own creative love for his whole creation ... The resurrection is the story of the gift of God ... It is not the fulfillment of our wishes, not even the hallowing of our deepest longings. We have no power to raise ourselves by our own willful bootstraps. If the resurrection depended on our will to die with distinction and significance, the spirit of it all would be desire not hope.” But desire centers on the ability of God to redeem those God had in mind from before the beginning of time.

To God belong the kingdom and the power,
and the glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

Description:

Jesus' high priestly prayer is prayed for the disciples and for us who follow after them.

Jesus was concerned that we always be protected by God, even though the world will hate his followers. However, God be praised, that we will be kept safe for all of eternity regardless.

Tags:

Jesus, Christ, disciples, hate, prayer, high, priestly, Sunday school, Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Ascension, Pentecost, tree, tomb, trumpet, mothers, children, safe, Hispanic, World Trade, perichoresis, resurrection

St. John's Episcopal Church

61 Broad Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

May 20, 2012

Seventh Sunday of Easter (B)

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“What are we going to do about peace?”

The Gospel: John 17:11b-19

Holy Father, make us one as you are one.

Amen.

This prayer of Jesus is apparently given in the earshot of his disciples. He prays openly for them, and for us their successors. He stresses the safety the disciples had experienced while they were with him. He "guarded" them and "protected" them in his Father God's name. The image is that of an older brother watching over younger brothers, or a parent looking out for their children. And the only one "lost" was the one who left the protective fold, Judas Iscariot. Of course, according to tradition all or nearly all of these disciples would die a martyr's death. So one might ask how effective was this prayer of Jesus. Finally the hatred of the world got the best of them. But the outcome of their fate was

likely determined by their consecration to the truth, the word of God. That would have been a significant determining factor in their vulnerability to the world. If they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the truth, that would be challenging to the worldly authorities. And eventually that would lead to their ultimate sacrifice.

However, this is not to say that the Church has been so sacrosanct in its own history either. A pope in the Middle Ages decided the middle-eastern Christian holy places should be won back by the Church. So he empowered various preachers to dispense indulgences in order to raise up an army to carry out that feat. The

indulgences were supposed to shorten or eliminate one's stay in purgatory. The Crusaders thus recruited soldiers who conducted massive slaughters of Moslems and Jews, and Orthodox Christians, from Egypt to Israel. The victories were bloody at best. The Vatican guards today are remnants of the Vatican church state throughout Italy that had an army of soldiers vigorously guarding its territories. And in our own country, Puritan clergy in Salem, Massachusetts, were responsible for putting several unfortunate women to death because they were convinced they were witches. So the church has taken on a very combative role itself from time to time.

We once had a interfaith meeting here at St. John's that identified a relatively unknown World War II Nazi death camp in Croatia called Jacenovac. In that camp as many as 700,000 people lost their lives, mostly Serbs, Jews, and gypsies. What was surprising to me was to see actual photographs of a large group of Roman Catholic nuns and Franciscans posing for friendly pictures with Croatian Nazi officials during World War II. There are even reports that some of the nuns and clergy helped operate the death camps there which spread over a hundred and fifty square miles. It was a jarring revelation to say the very least.

A job I once had required me to protect the Easter offerings in a huge city church. There had been reports of church robbers absconding with the offerings in some areas. One decision I had to make was to disallow the use of firearms by the guards in the church, believe it or not. I just could not see a shoot-out over a bunch of offering plates, filled or otherwise! And I never asked the guards whether they were trained in martial arts. But I will admit they were big men.

So the protective prayer of Jesus has not always been taken to heart. Even at Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter pulled his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's

servant. Jesus himself warned the disciples to sell their cloak to buy a sword, but when two swords were produced amongst the twelve, Jesus sternly said, "Enough!"

So how are we to "protect" the followers of Christ? And are we to do so?

I would have to say that I think we do have an obligation to protect those in our care. I am not an advocate for the National Rifle Association, far from it. I would more likely be a counter-advocate. But we do call the police when someone breaks into the church at night, which has happened on rare occasions. And the police carry weapons. One night an inebriated man broke into the window of the Warden's

Room that connects the church sacristy and the church, the room just behind the organ over there. He was nearly shot when the police came in during the middle of the night after the alarm had gone off. Their guns fortunately were still in their holsters, but they were at ready when one policeman in the pitch dark stumbled over the sleeping intruder in the back of the church. The intruder was sentenced to some short time in the county jail, and part of his parole required him to come back and apologize for his break-in. He said he had been drinking after he had lost his job. However, he told me that he would never drink again, and I thought he was possibly being sincere.

How can the church be a peace-monger amongst warmongers? A dramatic scene was played out between the two World Wars when Yugoslavia and Hungary were on the brink of hostilities. A young man by the name of W.A. Visser't Hooft recalled, [quote] "I crossed the border [between the two countries] with a letter from the Serbian to the Hungarian Student Christian Movement. When we opened it, we found that it contained only the text of the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John [our gospel text for today]--and this was just the right word in this situation" [endquote] [from "Memoirs," 1973, Page 33, quoted by David O. Bales in Sermon Mall, June 2000].

Pastor Visser't Hooft recalled the Amsterdam World Conference of Christian Youth that met one short month before the outbreak of World War II. War seemed inevitable. They thought they would have to cancel the conference, but it was held after all. After the war, delegates to that conference met regularly. Visser't Hooft recalled, [quote] "I do not believe that any large ecumenical conference has been so completely timely and relevant or has had such direct influence on the life of the delegates.... During the Uppsala Assembly in 1968 the men and women who had been at Amsterdam in 1939 met. They told each other what had happened to them and other delegates in the years

immediately following the conference. The story, which summarized the experience of many, was that of a girl from Lithuania. Soon after her return she had become a refugee. She had had to make her way through Spain and South America to the United States. The two most precious and helpful things she had carried with her were the Bible and the list of addresses of the delegates of the Amsterdam Youth Conference." [endquote] [from "Memoirs," Pages 103-104] Pastor Visser't Hooft went on from ecumenical youth work in Europe to become the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches.

Henry Joel Cadbury who was a Professor of Divinity at Harvard in the 1940's and a translator of the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament, made the following observation. "There are two kinds of [people] in our Society, and two kinds of people in the world. There are "therefore" people, and there are "however" people. "Therefore" people say, "There are children going to bed hungry in our community. "Therefore...." And they proceed to devise and define the ways in which they can meet the needs of those children. "However" people make the same beginning statement: "There are children going to bed hungry in our community, but they follow it with

"However".... And they explain why nothing can be done about it." To demonstrate his premise Professor Cadbury said, "We must improve race relations in Boston." And then he would go on to ask his listeners what their response was going to be--a "therefore" or a "however" response. He noted that the world needed fewer "however" people and more "therefore" people to do the work of God [from "Synthesis," June 2000]. It was the "therefore" people who moved to implement the gospel, to make it real. And in answering the need, true joy is found.

To live for Christ we need the help of God. We cannot do it on our own. It is by the power

of the Holy Spirit that we live and move and have our being. The world may hate us, and it probably will if we are truthful. But we are determined to live our lives as "therefore" people. We set our faces to be the intercessors of the world, the peacemakers.

Without the disciples Jesus prayed for, we would not be here today. Let us resolve our differences and witness to the world that we are indeed one in the Spirit of Christ. For beyond toleration we will find the will of God. Beyond our church barriers is the promise of unity and joy. We are the people of the Lord's pasture and the sheep of his fold. Come let us show we adore him by becoming one in the faith.

Amen.

