

## Easter 7: THE PRAYER

John 17:1-11 [MW17-15]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 28 May 2017

A kindergarten class went to the fire station for a tour and some instruction in fire safety. The firefighter was explaining what to do in case of a fire: "First, go to the door and feel the door to see if it is hot. Then, fall to your knees. Does anyone know why you ought to fall to your knees?" One of the little dears said, "Sure, to start praying to ask God to get us out of this mess!"

Who here has had the experience of being prayed for?

- who's had the experience of actually being there while someone or someones prayed for you
- it can be an amazing, comforting, uplifting and I have found, humbling, experience

When I was in the Nelson Diocese every second year the Bishop

- held a retreat for the stipendiary clergy in each region on the final day each clergy person was prayed for
- we gathered in the chapel and each person was prayed for in turn when it was your turn, you sat on a chair in the centre of the circle the others would pray for you one by one
- after everyone had prayed, the bishop would pray and lay hands on you and let me tell you it was a "wow!" experience
- there was a retreat just before I left that Diocese to come here they prayed especially for things about change, moving and new beginnings I found it very humbling and also very strengthening

That in part is what is going on in Jesus' prayer that was our Gospel reading this morning

- we heard John 17 verses 1 to 11 but the whole chapter, 26 verses, is a prayer sometimes called "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer"
- this prayer covers a whole range of topics in fact there is enough material for at least a month of sermons and I'm sure you'll be relieved that I won't be tackling them all this morning!
- what I wish to focus on is this: Jesus prays for his disciples

Chapters 13 to 16 of John's gospel record what happened

- at what we call "The Last Supper" we are presented with Jesus' actions and teaching as he prepared the disciples for when he would no longer be with them
- and after all this, Jesus prayed

Pastor and Teacher Bob Deffinbaugh comments:

The high priestly prayer of Jesus serves as a fitting conclusion to the upper room discourse of chapters 14-16. In verse one of chapter 17 John informs us that this prayer is to be understood as a kind of conclusion to the Lord's teaching in chapters 14-16. "These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, he said ..." One purpose of this prayer was to bring comfort and hope to the troubled hearts of the disciples. It may have been more effective at the moment than all the teaching of chapters 14-16. While a measure of assurance resulted from the words of our Lord in chapters 14-16, much more comfort and faith would be gained in the light of their fulfillment. This prayer must have done much to calm the troubled hearts of the [disciples].

I would like us to remember just two verses from chapter 17  
- verses 9 and 11 where Jesus prays to his Father ...

My followers belong to you and I am praying for them

I am coming to you but my followers are still in the world.  
So keep them safe by the power of the name you have given me.

That's in The Contemporary English Version, The Message translation puts it like this:  
Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life that you conferred as a gift through me.

Jesus prays for his disciples

- that they would be guarded, protected, kept safe  
remember this is the night before his crucifixion ... and what is he doing???
- he has been having a bit of a 'going away' party  
along with doing some teaching  
and now here he is praying for his disciples
- he is the one staring disaster in the face  
and yet he is concerned about what will happen to his friends

“O Holy Father,” Jesus cries, “protect them ...”

- he knew they would need that prayer in the coming days  
that the cost of being one of his followers in those early days would be high  
that there would be times when his disciples' lives would be in danger  
that there would be times when they would be tempted to run
- so Jesus prayed for them  
but notice that he did not pray these problems would somehow 'disappear'  
he prayed that they would be strong
- he did not pray that the disciples would escape, for no one escapes the trials of life  
rather he prayed for victory:  
“I am not asking you to take them out of the world  
but I ask you to protect them”

William J. Bausch recounts the experience of American journalist Terry Anderson, who was taken hostage by Islamic Jihad militants and held prisoner in Beirut:  
He admitted that he, a lapsed Catholic, was made strong because of prayer. About a month after he was taken, he and the others were given Bibles. With nothing else to do, he read it and reread it. He was especially drawn to the apostle Paul who struggled with his weakness, imprisonment and pride - just as Terry did. Through Paul's struggles, Terry was able to express his love for God. His only prayer was to ask for patience and strength to endure whatever came, the precise prayer Jesus prayed for him. His trial went on for seven years. He did not escape it. He was made strong through prayer. Jesus had prayed for him.

Who has had a visiting evangelist or overseas speaker pray for them?

Who has had a bishop pray for them?

Of course, Jesus showed us that before God we are all equal

- everyone has the same access to our Heavenly Father  
there is no favouritism because of status or age or experience  
everyone's prayers have the ear of God

- but sometimes prayer just seems to have more authority when someone else prays especially some named overseas evangelist or a bishop

So allow me to take this just a little further ...

- who here is a follower of Jesus?  
well Jesus is praying for you
- here is John 17 verses 9 and 11 again, where Jesus prays:  
My followers belong to you and I am praying for them.  
I am coming to you but my followers are still in the world,  
so keep them safe by the power of the name you have given me.
- get that: Jesus is praying for you - not some visiting speaker, not a bishop but a member of the Holy Trinity, the Son of the Living God the one who lived, died and rose again is praying specifically for you
- doesn't that kind of blow your mind!?

Jesus is praying that you will be kept safe

- praying that our Heavenly Father will guard you and protect you that you will be able to stand strong in all life confronts you with
- and that in the midst of all this you may know the joy and peace that our Heavenly Father alone can give

Whenever it is dark and cold and bleak

- imagine the words prayed by Jesus in 3 metre high bright orange like a heater element radiating light and warmth
- "Keep them safe"

Guard them, protect them, keep them safe - that is what Jesus prays for us

- in response, two things for you:  
one to recognise  
one to do

This is what to do:

- ask yourself: who do I know that needs to be made strong?  
who do you need to pray for ... ?
- not that they can avoid life's hurts or be spared disappointment and trouble but rather that they be made strong to endure and overcome
- I'll give you a minute to think of someone or for the Spirit to bring someone to mind

[space]

- please pray for this person this week

This is what to recognise:

- Jesus prays for you  
you are included in this prayer  
Jesus prays specifically for you
- I am going to read a prayer based on Jesus' prayer in John 17  
I invite you to hear it as Jesus praying for you  
and when I leave a space I invite you to quietly or silently say your name

Please hear this as a prayer from Jesus for you:

*Father, I am praying for ...  
Father, I know them and you know them and they are very, very precious.  
You know the particular gifts ... has  
and you delight to see them used in your service.  
You know the faith ... has;  
and the faith they struggle with.  
You know very well the situations they are facing right now;  
Father, I ask you to keep ... safe  
protect them from harm  
and give them the courage and strength they need to face the challenges before them.  
Father, I ask that you would give ... a special touch  
that they might know you are there with them today and always.  
Father, please bless ... in your care.  
Amen.*

[moment of silence, hand out prayers, then the Affirmation: 'We Are Not Alone']