

JESUS PRAYS

John 17:11-19 [MW18-17]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 13 May 2018

When you're going away

- when you are going to leave your family and friends for quite some time what do you do?
- or, what might you do?

[space for thinking and answers ...]

Jesus was preparing to leave his closest friends – his disciples

- they had been through so much together and he had big plans, big hopes for them though they had not cottoned on to that yet
- he also knew that he was not just leaving them but would die a particularly cruel and painful death
- his disciples however seemed quite unaware of all this

Jesus does arrange a kind of 'going away party' – better known as “The Last Supper”

- and towards the conclusion of this Jesus gives his closest friends, his disciples, a parting gift: Jesus prays

Jesus prays

This morning in those verses read from John's gospel we heard Jesus at prayer

- in this very poignant situation it is an intriguing prayer which includes three distinct petitions that touch our lives here today
- and invite us to pray in the same way

First, on this night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for his friends

- "O Holy Father," he cried, "protect them..." Jesus knew they would need that prayer in the coming days
- he knew that the cost of being one of his followers in those early days would be high
- he knew 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 he prayed for his disciples notice however, he did not pray that they would be released from these problems but only that they would be strong

Jesus did not pray for escape – for no one escapes the trials of life

- he prayed for victory Jesus prayed:
*I am not asking you to take them out of the world,
but I ask you to protect them from the evil one*

In his book, *Den of Lions: Memoirs of Seven Years*, Terry Anderson – an American journalist taken hostage by Islamic militants and held hostage for seven years - tells of his captivity in Beirut for those years. He admitted that he, a lapsed Catholic, was made strong because of prayer. About a month after his captivity he and the others were given Bibles. With nothing else to do, he read 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.

I invite you to take a moment and consider: [PP Slide]

- who in your life needs to be made strong?
whom do you need to pray for, not that they escape life's hurts
but that they be made strong?
- perhaps you might pause briefly and say their names to yourself
and present them before God

If the first thing Jesus prayed for was that his friends would be made strong

- the second thing Jesus prayed for was that his friends would be united.

A man named Tony Campolo tells a story about being at a worship service where a man prayed aloud for a friend. "Dear Lord," he said, "you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in that silver trailer down the road a mile. He's leaving his wife and kids. Please do something to bring the family together." The man prayed again, repeating the location: "the silver trailer down the road a mile." Annoyed, Tony wanted to say, "Enough already. Do you think God's asking, 'What's that address again?'" Anyway, after the prayer service, Tony was driving home when on the turnpike he noticed a hitchhiker. He decided to give him a lift. "My name's Tony," Campolo said. "What's yours?" "Charlie Stoltzfus," the hitchhiker said. Campolo was dumbfounded. It was the young man for whom the prayer had been offered. Campolo got off at the next exit. "Hey, where you taking me?" asked the hitchhiker. "Home," Campolo said. The hitchhiker stared in amazement as Tony drove right to the young man's silver trailer. That afternoon that young man and his wife gave themselves to each other and to God.

I invite you to take a moment and consider: [PP Slide]

- who in your life needs to be united?
who is alienated from you
or from their family, friends, community?
- perhaps you might pause briefly and say their names to yourself
and present them before God

The third thing Jesus prayed for was not, this time, for his friends, but for himself

- that's significant
it was an important prayer
- Jesus said,
"I consecrate myself for their sakes. . . so that they may be consecrated in truth"

The word "consecrate" means to make holy

- so Jesus in effect is praying
"I make myself holy in order that my disciples may be holy"
- he knew there was no other way
he himself must be grounded in virtue and truth if they were to be
- it's as simple and demanding as that

And that's where it impacts us here today

- we are to make ourselves holy so that our friends, our children, our family, our co-workers, our neighbours, may be holy
- there is no other way

It's like what Booker T. Washington wrote in his autobiography:

The older I grow, the more I am convinced that there is no education which one can get from books and costly apparatus that is equal to that which can be gotten from contact with great men and women

So, too, there is no other way to instill virtue and holiness

- than to have contact with holy men and women
- Jesus prays for us today to consecrate ourselves in truth
- some of you might remember the actor Jimmy Stewart?

He once wrote in a magazine article that the center of his universe as a boy was the family hardware store and, more importantly, the man who ran it, his father. He said that all his life his father had a great influence on him. One example was when Jimmy's bomber squadron was preparing to go overseas during World War II. Before departure, Jimmy's father embraced him and slipped a letter into his pocket. It read, "My dear Jim boy. Soon after you read this letter, you will be on your way to the worst sort of danger. . . .I am banking on the enclosed copy of the ninety-first Psalm. The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise of these words ... I can say no more ... I love you more than I can tell you. Dad." Those words of the ninety-first Psalm? "You will be safe in God's care; his faithfulness will protect and defend you ... God will put his angels in charge over you to protect you wherever you go."

Jimmy Stewart's father was holy

- that is, he consecrated himself, so that his son might be holy
- that his son might have values

Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper is profound and a pattern for ours

- pray for those near and dear to you:
 - first, that they may be strong
 - second, that they may be united
- then pray for yourself:
 - that you may be holy

I invite you to take a moment to reflect and consider [PP Slide with quiet music]

- and pray
- for yourself
- and others, as the Spirit leads you

[space for reflection and prayer]

Jesus prays

- a prayer which reaches across the years and gathers us in
- for we too are Jesus' disciples, his closest friends
- so it seems fitting that we respond in a shared prayer
- and I invite you to pray this responsive prayer with me

[PP Slides]

Leader:

Lord, you have never waited for us to become perfect
before showing us the measure of your love,
or calling us to serve you in the world.

People:

We dare to believe you are always calling us to a new venture;
pointing us to new horizons in ministry,
and will never cease to do so.

Leader:

This is a task, Lord, we cannot do alone;
we need you as our guide,
and the love of each other.

People:

With your help we will bear one another's burdens,
and love our neighbour as ourself.
We will accept disappointment and frustration,
opposition and rejection,
and not lose heart.

Leader:

We will love your world as you love it,
bring friendship into our work,
and courage into our actions.

People:

We will bring freshness into our homes,
excitement into our studies,
and adventure into our church.

Leader:

Create in us a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within us.

People:

Stir into flame the gifts you have given,
and the faith to use them without reserve.

Together:

As your disciples, make us know the freedom
to move into the unknown and the untried,
to see the opportunities of the new day,
and to serve our present age with
compassion, imagination, and courage.
Lord, be with us until we have done our part and share your joy.
Amen.