

The Seventh Sunday of Easter - Celebration of the Ascension of our Lord

June 5, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 17:1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one. (NIV)

Overprotective. Have you ever been accused of being or called somebody else overprotective? I think some might look at the parenting of Lisa and I and call us overprotective. We always try to make sure we see and know where our children are at all times. We rarely ever leave them with anyone else. We make the effort to drive them to a private school, a WELS school, where they are surrounded by Christian teachers and students who believe the same thing we do. I have heard that we are sheltering our kids. And you know what? If people would say that we are overprotective and sheltering our children I would have to say: "You bet we are."

All of us parents, because we love our kids, in some ways or others shelter them, don't we? We want to shelter them because we understand what is in the world. We try to protect our children because what the Bible says is true about bad company corrupting good character. We pray for God-fearing friends. We recognize our children have only so much time with us under our roof. So we want to teach and train and pray with and guide, yes even protect and shelter, them for as long as God allows. One day we realize we will no longer be right there at their side.

Isn't that also what Jesus does for His disciples? Didn't Jesus protect and shelter His disciples for the three years He was with them on earth? Jesus used all the time He had with them to teach them and train them and guide them. He showed them how to pray. And Jesus protected His disciples! He protected them from danger, sheltered them from the false ideals of the world, and defended them from all false teachings. He watched over them in all their ways. Now, as Jesus realizes the time has finally come to leave His disciples and send them into the world, He offers up this beautiful prayer.

Listen closely as: **The Perfect High Priest Prays for Our Protection.**

Jesus is in the upper room with His disciples on Maundy Thursday evening. A special meal had been served and a lot of words had already been spoken. ***“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed.”*** This heartfelt prayer is the last recorded words of Jesus before He goes out into the garden of Gethsemane. And who is this Man who boldly comes before God? We know the answer, don’t we? Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Messiah. As the Christ one of His three-fold offices is High Priest. One of the functions of being Old Testament high priest was to intercede for the people. That is what Jesus, the perfect High Priest, does here.

For whom is Jesus, this High Priest, interceding? ***“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”*** Please understand Jesus loves the world and wants all to be saved, but here He makes it clear that it is not for the world He is praying. He is praying for those who believe in Him. Jesus is interceding for His disciples. He prays for those who kept His Word and received it in faith. He prays for those who recognize Jesus is God’s Son and trust Him as Savior. In other words Jesus is not just praying for His disciples with Him that evening, but for us as well. He prays on behalf of all believers.

There are times we want, even need, someone else to speak on our behalf, aren’t there? If someone brings a complicated lawsuit against us, wouldn’t we want a highly trained, well-spoken lawyer? When people are hurting us with their words or slandering our good names, which of us would not long for a friend to speak up and defend us? When kids get into trouble, how comforting is it to have a loving parent willing to speak for our welfare. Yet, none of these examples begin to compare to how much we need, and how comforting it is, to have Jesus, the perfect High Priest, speak on our behalf. ***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2).*** Or as John writes: ***“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2).***

So what does Jesus say to the Father for us in these verses of this prayer? ***“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”*** It was not time for Jesus to bring glory to His Father by completing the work He came to do. Jesus would do that the next day. After pouring out His heart in prayer for us, the next day Jesus went to the cross and poured out His blood for us. Jesus not only prayed for us, but He paid for us - the price of sin, and death, and hell. Jesus, our perfect High Priest, gave Himself as a once for all sacrifice for sin. Jesus also knew His tremendous sacrifice would end in glory - in the glory of His resurrection and ascension.

Jesus’ prayer is that you and me receive the benefits of His work. ***“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*** Jesus prays that we stay in the one true faith and enjoy forgiveness of sins and life eternal. To simply summarize what Jesus is praying for before all these things take place - He prays for our protection. He doesn’t want any of His disciples to be lost.

“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.”

Why is Jesus so concerned about protecting us? Because Jesus understands what is in this world. In fact, right before Jesus began to pray He said to His disciples ***“in this world you will have trouble.”*** Temptations come from all corners. Think of all the dangers to our faith and troubles in this world. Addiction to drugs or alcohol; so many sources of improper entertainment so easily accessed even with a click on our computers; disease, depression, pain, and loss; busy schedules and the lure of pleasure and money - just to name a few. There will be people trying to influence us to go down roads God commands us not to go down. There will be constant lies told to us by the evil one, the devil. Our own sinful nature is still lurking within us preventing us from doing the good we want to do.

Now do we understand why Jesus pours out this heartfelt prayer for His disciples, for us? Do we recognize why He wants to protect and shelter us? How does Jesus want to do this? Listen once again: ***“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me.”*** Jesus wants our Father in heaven to protect us by His name. The name of God and Jesus is everything that God reveals to us about Himself in His Word. Jesus wants His disciples to hold onto His Word - to hold onto Him. He wants us to hear again and again His great love for us for Jesus wants to shelter us in His love. He wants to protect our souls with His message of repentance and forgiveness.

His Word is still living and active to bring us to faith, keep us in faith, and guide us in faith. Jesus ascended to God's right hand to make sure that His Word still goes out from His Church. Our perfect High Priest still sits at that right hand interceding for us, still praying this beautiful prayer on our behalf. If someone were to ask Jesus, who promises to be with us always even to the very end of the age, if He was overprotective and sheltering us, His disciples, I believe we would hear this comforting answer: ***“You bet I am, because I want them to be here in heaven where I am.”*** Amen.