

Easter 7B. May 13, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Acts 1:15-17, 21-26. Psalm 1. I John 5:9-13. John 17:6-19.

Acts 1:

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, ¹⁶‘Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—¹⁷for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’ ...²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.’ ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17:

6 ‘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. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And 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. ¹²While 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. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word

is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

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I expect you notice in the prayers each week that we have been praying for the Call Committee as they looked for a permanent pastor for this congregation. And we have prayed for the pastors they have been interviewing and for the pastoral candidate recommended by the church council. It will be a two-way process – our choosing and the candidate's choosing.

In the meantime, we keep on being church; we learn patience; we wait and wonder. If I suggested to Paul, our Call Committee Chair – that we could just do what the early disciples did in today's first lesson: pray and flip a coin, he would know I was joking – about flipping the coin.

But there's a whole lot to be said for the praying part. In today's Gospel, Jesus is praying for his disciples. It's the night in which he was betrayed. It's the night Jesus prayed that he might be spared the cup of suffering – but "not my will but yours be done" he cried to his heavenly father.

In Jesus' prayer which we just heard in the Gospel, he is committing his beloved followers to God's protection, to God's truth, to the unity that only God can give. He knows there will be suffering; he knows the world will hate them; but he also knows that their witness in the world will be heavenly work.

He is not praying to change God's mind or heart. God's mind and heart are Jesus' mind and heart and this mind and heart desires only good and life

and love. Jesus' words are for the disciples and recorded by St. John for US. The prayer is to change US.

Jesus's prayer confirms that God is where everything starts. We are created by God, we are nurtured by God, and we are sent out by God to witness to his love, to live a life of courage, kindness, generosity, and collaboration. We are sent out to love and encourage one another.

Jesus prays that our joy may be complete – in spite of the perils of the world.

Hear again one of the sentences in Jesus' prayer, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine." We are lumped in together with all of Jesus' friends and followers. And lumped in together in God's hands.

I remember so often singing with Sunday School or pre-school children, "He's got the whole world in his hands...the whole wide world in his hands."

That's why we pray OUR father and not My father. That's why we ask for OUR daily bread, not MY daily bread. That's why we ask that WE be saved from the time of trial, not just "Save ME from the time of trial."

When I pray with various groups or individuals in our church, I pray knowing that God already knows our needs. We don't have to give God direction about what we need nor change God's mind about what is best. We have read in the scriptures that the Holy Spirit prays for us with sighs deeper than words, for "we know not how to pray."

But when I pray with someone, say a grandchild, I pray the words that will comfort that child. Bless Mom and Daddy, keep us safe till morning light, help us with tomorrow's school work, or, please help Gracie's sore throat get better. I'm not trying to change God's mind. God knows what Gracie needs and God desires it. Sadly, the world may interfere with God's desires – but Jesus was well aware of that.

I cringe a little when people tell me that their prayers "worked." As if, because they prayed, God was merciful and healed someone or provided help when needed. Prayer "works" when WE are changed, when we find ourselves giving thanks for healing or help and when we give our selves

over to circumstances we cannot change and ask God to help us accept them, knowing and trusting God's promises to be with us. A new Willie Nelson song goes, "It's not something you get over...but it's something you get through." We say that often. God doesn't stop the tragedies of this world, but accompanies us through them.

Prayer "works" when Gracie falls asleep with comfort in her heart. Prayer "works" when a meeting runs smoothly because people become aware of God's presence in that room. Prayer "works" when we pray for the poor and we find a way to deliver food or medical care or good, affordable housing.

We pray for many sick, near and far, people deeply dear to us and people dear to our friends. These prayers "work" even if the body is not returned to physical health or the illness "cured." These prayers "work" when our brother or sister is made whole – healed -- in mind and spirit, brought closer to God, reconciled with family members and friends, and surrounded by the warmth and love of the community.

Prayer "works" when we ask God's forgiveness and our hearts are warmed and we are given strength to head out on Monday with a clean slate and a willing spirit.

Each Sunday I pray for a pastor friend in Iowa; each Sunday she prays for me. A good friend in Florida prays for my daughter and granddaughter. My dad said he prayed for us kids every day we walked together on this earth. We pray for the sick, we remember the bereaved. We value every prayer said for us, for, as a good friend said, "I don't know how I'd get through this, if I didn't have faith in God and know people are praying for me."

And so, at Jesus' invitation, we keep on praying. WE are changed by the prayers we know are said. I take comfort knowing my friend prays for my family. I have joy knowing my dad prayed for me every day. I am confident in knowing that Jesus prays for us.

We know who we are and WHOSE we are: the beloved followers of the one who prays for us. The one whose LIFE eternal we share – not in some future time, but today.

Jesus knew life would be difficult, but he also knew that God would be with his disciples as they learned to live into the life he offered them. Blessings, challenges, prayers – they all are part of the journey with Jesus.

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For every group or committee or family that struggles with issues and confusion and seeks to be one in Christ, for every one of the expanding circles of believers, people sent out to witness like the early apostles, for every one of us who struggles with sickness, with making decisions, with abandonment by children or friends...for every one of us Jesus prays - - even, and especially, when we disagree -- that we might all be one and that we might be protected AND that we may have the very joy of Jesus himself – lies and sins wiped away by Christ's truth and life and love. Alleluia, Christ is risen! [Congregation: He is risen indeed, alleluia!] Thanks be to God.

Today we remember our mothers....many of whom have left this earth. Some earlier than we had hoped; others linger on to this day at ripe, old ages. But we give thanks for the good they gave us in our lives, how they may have taught us to pray. And we remember all the people who have “mothered” us along the way: teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors – we are blessed for those mothering influences.

In the time between Jesus' ascension to heaven – last Thursday the church marked it -- and the Day of Pentecost – which we celebrate next Sunday – Jesus' disciples were still timid and confused – despite Jesus' prayers. That would soon change. Stay tuned and be back here next week!

Let us pray:

Christ Jesus, you are what I need, the Bread and Wine on which I feed,
No friend so true, no life so new – I'm rich indeed!

O Savior, now my spirit raise, give new direction to my ways,
In all I view, in all I do, to give you praise. Amen.