

“Jesus prays for you”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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John 17:6-19

by Rev. Patrick D. Heery

Today, we have the joy of welcoming seven new members into our church family. We also are going to hear about how together we are supporting the education of Tony and Darius, two Ugandan boys, as they pursue their dreams. I’m thinking that’s a pretty good sermon all unto itself. So I’m going to keep today’s message short and simple.

Last week, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. Today, Jesus prays. He prays for the disciples who have walked and ministered with him for three years. He prays for these fishermen, and tax collectors, and day laborers, whom he has come to love. They sit with him now at the Last Supper. He can see that they are afraid, confused. They’ve given up everything to follow him, and now he tells them that he’s leaving.

He has tried teaching them. He has commanded them to love each other as he has loved them. He has asked them not to let their hearts be troubled but to believe in God, as they believe in him. He has told them to stand strong in the face of suffering and persecution. He has shown them the way to God.

He knows, though, that for all his teaching, it is not enough. They will hide. They will doubt. They will deny him. They will squabble. They will lose their way.

It’s why Jesus came in the first place. It’s why he’s about to lay down his life for them. Because they can’t do it on their own. And so Jesus prays for them. Not in private. But right there in front of them, so that they know that he’s praying for them. And he’ll keep on praying for them, no matter how many times they mess up, no matter how many times they hurt him, no matter how many times they hurt each other.

Jesus looks at these men and women and says to God that they are his, and he is theirs; they are bound to each other. He loves them—loves them despite everything he knows—and he asks God to love them too. He asks that he be the bridge from them to God, so that what sin separated, love would repair, and all would be one, all with God.

Today, Jesus prays for us in the same way. Last week, we said that to pray was to reach out in love to God and neighbor. But if that was all prayer was, if it was completely dependent on our capacity for selfless love, it would be a burden too great to bear. Before we pray, before we ever try, Jesus prays for us. Before we ever lift a thought, or a hand, or a word, Jesus reaches out to us.

He prays for us, despite everything he knows about us. He prays that love would enter us, surround us, and show us the truth: that, in Jesus Christ, God is not far; God is here; God is one with us.

He prays for us when we are hurting. He sends us his courage when we are afraid, his wisdom when we are foolish, his joy when we are sad, his life when we are dying. He places his prayer on our lips, making our words his, our love his, so that when we do finally reach out in prayer, we do so with him at our side.

Of course, it's easy enough to understand how Jesus, the man, prayed for his disciples, right there around that table in the 1st century CE. It's harder to fathom how Jesus, who is one with God in all mystery and eternity, prays for us now. All language, all metaphor, all analogy, fail, for we cannot begin to comprehend the mysteries of the divine. All we know is that Jesus loves us, and he extends that love to us even now, in what today we are calling "prayer." If our prayer is an extension of ourselves into God and neighbor, then Jesus' prayer is an extension of God into us.

Jesus' prayer means we do not walk alone. It means God is with us. It means we have on our side something that can move mountains and uproot injustice and wipe away tears and unveil the beauty of the world, something more powerful than death, more powerful than sin: we have love. God's love.

And we have it, because, every second of the day, in every parcel of the universe, for every age to come, Jesus prays for us.

His prayer is the wrecking ball of every wall between us and God, between us and salvation.

So today, somewhere on your bulletin, or on a scrap of paper, I want you to write what you need Jesus to pray for. I invite you to carry this piece of paper with you, in your pocket or your purse or briefcase, and pull it out from time to time this week as a reminder that Jesus cares about you and is praying for you. May it be a reminder of the power, and the love, that surround you.

Amen.