**Sunday, May 16th, 2021**

**John 17:6-19**

One of the tribes of early native Americans

          had a unique practice of training their young boys for adulthood.

On the night of a boy's 13th birthday, after learning

          hunting, scouting, and fishing skills, he was put to one final test.

The young man was blindfolded and led several miles away from their village.

He was left in the dense forest to spend the entire night all alone.

Until that time, he had never been away

          from the security of his family, friends, and the tribe.

When the others had left, and he took off the blindfold,

          he found himself all alone, surrounded by the dark trees.

He had no idea where he was, or in which direction his village was.

The loneliness, the darkness, and the lostness were terrifying and overwhelming. Every time a twig snapped; he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce.

When a light breeze caused the tree branches to sway,

          he imagined a dangerous predator stalking him.

He did not dare to walk around in the darkness,

          and he could not risk falling asleep.

After what seemed like an eternity, dawn finally arrived.

As the first rays of sunlight lit the forest, the young boy looked all around him.

He could see the rocks and grass, flowers and trees,

          and the faint sign of the path they had traveled the night before.

Then, to his utter astonishment, he saw a man standing just a few feet away,

          armed with a bow and arrow.

It was his father.

He had been there all night long, watching and protecting his son.

Jesus knew how much we need our Heavenly Father's protection.

There are so many problems and dangers in this world,

          and we are often unable to protect ourselves.

It was so important to Jesus, that on the night he was betrayed,

          and faced his own crucifixion, pain, and death, He prayed

          that our Heavenly Father would watch over us and protect us.

Imagine listening to Jesus praying for you.

Knowing He cares that much for each one of us, gives us the strength and courage to continue doing His work throughout this world.

Our Heavenly Father sent His son Jesus to us so we could

          begin to understand how much He loves us, and watches over us.

And He sends us into the world so others may come to know Him.

He remains with us, through the tough times, and in the good times.

He never leaves us.

He is always with us, watching, guiding, leading, and encouraging us.

When we listen to His prayers, we discover how important we are to Him.

The Sunflower is one of the most amazing flowers God created.

Have you ever watched a huge field of these incredible flowers?

They face directly toward the sun, following it as it travels across the sky,

          from morning until nightfall.

They literally follow the sun's path throughout the day.

Watching one sunflower follow the sun is fascinating.

But watching hundreds in absolute unison follow the sun

          is actually incredibly awesome.

However, sunflowers continue tracking the sun's direction

          long after the sun has set.

After dark, when the flowers can no longer feel the rays of the sun,

          they continue to track the sun's path through 360 degrees.

In some way, whether they are in the sunlight or not,

          they keep following the sun's path.

When we pray and receive reassurance and answers from God,

          we feel strengthened by His presence, and response.

In those times, we are confident we are not alone.

We are certain He is guiding us, and we are glad to follow Him.

But there are so many times when we pray, that we only seem to hear silence.

Then it can be difficult to trust, and we wonder if we are all alone.

We are not sure what to do.

We don't know how to get through our problems, and worries, and fears.

In those times, when we don't see God doing something,

          we can imitate the sunflowers.

Whether the sun is in full view or not, the sunflowers never stop

          following the path of the sun.

God has shown us many times that He has always been with us,

          whether we see him or not,

          whether we hear His voice or not.

He never leaves us; He never ignores us.

Our faith provides us with the power to trust in His presence, always.

Certainly, we humans ought to be as faithful as sunflowers,

          and trust in his presence, whatever the circumstances.

And just imagine what a difference it makes

          when a huge group of us trust Him, and follow Him, working all together.

Dad was working hard in his home office.

But his 5-year-old daughter Sara kept interrupting him.

She asked endless questions.

Finally, she asked what the world looked like.

Dad had seen a colorful picture of the world in one of the magazines on his desk.

He searched through a pile until he found it.

He tore out the page in the magazine.

Then he tore the picture into about 20 pieces and handed them to Sara.

He told her: "Take the pieces to your room and try to put them together.

          If you complete the puzzle, you will see what the world looks like."

Eagerly Sara took the puzzle pieces to her room.

It was not very long before she returned saying: "Look Daddy I finished it."

She showed him the map, with all the pieces carefully taped together correctly.

Dad was surprised. "How did you finish it so fast?" he asked.

Sara laughed and said, "I couldn't figure out how to put the world together.

          So I look at the back of the pieces and saw it was a picture of Jesus.

          That was easier to put together.

          When I got all of Jesus back where He belonged,

          then the whole world just came together."

The little girl was right.

With Jesus, the whole world can, and does, come together.

If Jesus needed to pray to His Heavenly Father so often,

          how much more do we need to pray?

Spending time in prayer is important, and necessary for us.

As we spend time talking to our Heavenly Father, our lives start to come together.

The prayers of all the followers of Jesus have stretched in an unbroken chain

          throughout history down through the centuries.

We can trust God's promise to be with us – always.

AMEN