**5/21/23**

**Unity**

**John 17:1-11**

Another Easter Day is upon us folks! May continued Easter Blessings be granted to each and every one of you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! For we are forever thankful and mindful that he has Risen, and he has Risen Indeed! Amen!

We have quite the morning on tap here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church with Bryce and Madison getting ready to make some pretty cool commitments and steps in their individual faith lives. Baptism and First Holy Communion are huge steps for sure, and these children taking these steps also remind us all of who we are, and whose we are. Their parents, family, and friends are going to be proud of them. This congregation is also going to be proud of them, and we are going to welcome them even further into our family here as well. These affirmations and actions of faith are vital to be witnessed by each and every one of us, and they are vital for us to be an active part of as well. Thanks be to God for these children’s parents inquiring about this, and thanks be to God for these children’s willingness to learn more about their faith and embrace it in front of our very own eyes this morning! As we go through the service today as Madison is Baptized, and then we have Bryce and Madison join me at the table for the very first time, I will be looking out into the Congregation as well. I am sure I will see your eyes glowing with excitement and curiosity as well. Let us all participate and love the opportunity we have before us on this special day.

With that being said I do not want to glance over, or blow past, an important point in the church calendar year that occurred this past Thursday. Our first reading today even reminded us of this very important point. Does anyone happen to know what this past Thursday was? The Ascension of Our Lord is the day that “Jesus leaves his disciples with a commission, a blessing, and a promise of the Holy Spirit.” (1) “Christ ascends into heaven and his followers are assured that the Spirit will empower them to be witnesses throughout the earth. The disciples were told to not gaze up into heaven to look for Jesus (Acts 1:11); we find his presence among us as we proclaim the word and share the Easter feast. We too long for the Spirit to enliven our faith and invigorate our mission.” (1) What an appropriate day to just have passed, and then come to the full realization of following the commission he set forth for all of us as we get to experience Madison’s Baptism, as well as Bryce and Madison’s First Holy Communion. I do believe this is for sure the Spirit stepping in and enlivening our faith, and invigorating the faith and mission of these children this very day for sure. Praise be to God for that!

As we move onto today’s Gospel Reading we find ourselves in kind of an awkward gap between the Ascension and Pentecost. The disciples are following the instruction given to them from the Lord. They are in their upper room following Jesus’ departure from earth, and they are waiting for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them at Pentecost. So, we get to today’s story where we experience “Chapter 17 of John known as Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer.” (4)… and what a prayer that is indeed! That prayer is for you and me, not this world that we live in.

We hear that “The first thing he prays for is that his purpose be fulfilled. He came into this world to die on a cross. He came to reconcile a broken humanity with God. He came to absorb and defeat the sin of the world. And so he prays that all this will be so. And then he prays for his followers. As he will no longer be with them, he prays for their protection. He asks that they be protected “so that they may be ONE.” Jesus prays for our unity.” (4)

“Jesus is praying for the unity of the church which will come out of the lives of these disciples. There is a definite obligation for us as followers of Christ to uphold, to pull-together, to encourage, to comfort, to be there for another member of the community with comfort, cheer and love as we bind ourselves together in this community of Christ, known as the church.” (2) So, it is that very point that I made earlier. We get those real life experiences today, and we follow our call and purpose together as a congregation to raise these children up in this family of believers.

“In that purpose of life, there is a togetherness as we live our Christian lives. We are together as the church, we are together with Christ and we are together with the Holy Spirit. In this togetherness, we draw strength in our Christian journey. People with a variety of backgrounds, abilities, interests, and needs make up Christ’s church, so uniting in a common purpose is not an easy process. Yet when we let the Lord do His work among us, shaping us and assigning our place in the structure, we become part of a strong, solid edifice.” (2)

So, as we move towards closing things off today let me share a particularly interesting story I found during my research for today’s Sermon. As I read this story to you I am actually going to invite you to close your eyes. I want you to do this in order to close yourselves off temporarily from any other distractions that might be around you. I also want you to do this so that maybe you can paint the picture in your own minds, and really take this simple yet important concept in. Are you ready?

“"Who Flew the Kite?"......"I did," said the sticks, "I did," said the paper. "I did," said the boy. "No, I did," said the wind." But they all flew the kite together. If the sticks had broken, the tail caught in a tree, the paper torn, or the wind had lulled, the kite would have come down. Each had a part to play. The application is inescapable; each have a work to do.” (2)

Alright, you can now open your eyes, that is if you have not done so already. I think that was pretty simple and to the point, and it provided a rather simple yet profound concept. However, sometimes something even as simple as that can get overlooked in the grand scheme of things. We all too often have a tendency to try and move towards the end result. We unfortunately do not slow down enough to pay attention to every intricate part that makes things really happen. So, I encourage you to be like the disciples and wait eagerly for the Holy Spirit to descend upon you next Sunday at Pentecost, but slow down and take in the moments together on our continued journey there.

We are called to remember from this very story, and our continued journey that “If the work of the Lord is to be a success, then all parts must be played by every member of the fellowship, every member of the community. We have to work as a community in visiting, giving, preaching and countless other jobs to make the church and its work successful. We must all work together and each do what we can to help.” (2)

I also offer this in closing. We are called to realize today, and every day, that “The most important task that Jesus felt he had performed was taking on the responsibility of caring for God’s children - and so this is one of the most glorious tasks for us to do as well.” (3) Care for one another as he taught us, and pray for continued unity by following his example.

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year A 2023

May 21, 2023

Seventh Sunday of Easter

(2) SermonCentral.com

Unity

Contributed by Tim Zingale on Apr 28, 2008

Scripture: John 17:1-11

Denomination: Lutheran

(3) SermonCentral.com

The Time Has Come To Glorify The Son

Contributed by Joel Pankow on May 10, 2002

Scripture: John 17:1-11

Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

The Prayer Of The Divine

Contributed by Mary Erickson on May 26, 2020

Scripture: John 17:1-11

Denomination: Lutheran

**John 17:1-11**

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, asking

that those who continue his work in this world will live in unity.

1After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples], he looked up to heaven

and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify

you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all

whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the

only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by

finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your

own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

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.”