

**Shawnee Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, June 21, 2020**  
**Rev. Thomas Bartha**  
**“Jesus’ Prayer For Us!”**

Over these past two months, like you, Mary and I have watched Shawnee worship, along with other online services, always with appreciation. For today, I had a litany prepared of all the events over recent months. But it is a list you already know too well. The church has been apart when we have so needed community, so needed to be together—listening and learning, asking tough questions, examining our own thoughts, exploring, listening more.

So, how is God speaking to you during this time? How is God’s Word addressing all that we are going through—a time when so many voices are crying for our attention? Needful listening on our part. So step into this worship of Sunday, June 21, and a blessed Father’s Day. As I did last month for Mother’s Day, here is a little snippet from my own life for Father’s Day. One favorite memory was of Sunday evenings, when my Dad would often phone in a pizza order for our family from Gatto’s Pizza in Columbus, Ohio. “It’s your pal Bartha,” he would say, and place the order.

He died suddenly at age 56, far too young. I was age 20. So, some weeks after his funeral I phoned in a pizza order. “Hello,” I said. “It’s your old pal, Bartha,” and without warning my voice cracked and my eyes filled with tears. I still miss him. I still would like to be so much more like him. You have your own memories. So, a blessed Father’s Day.

**Call to Worship** from First Chronicles 16:

O give thanks to the Lord call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.  
Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

**Prayer of Confession**

Holy God, we live in a world of collapsed dreams, of discouragement, hurt and fatigue.  
We acknowledge the times when our grasp upon you has been so frail. Yet your grip  
upon us is so firm. O God, forgive our doubt.

You call us to be followers of Jesus, to speak the truth boldly as he did, to care for the  
needy and the suffering. Yet we find the cost of discipleship high, and waiver in our  
devotion.

Forgive us, we pray. By your Holy Spirit transform us, that our words, thoughts and  
actions would bring honor to Jesus Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**Words of Assurance**—Hebrews 4:14-16

## John 17:11-19

## “Jesus’ Prayer for Us

News reports show beaches now with fewer sunbathers, hopefully distanced on the sand. Some wading in chilly waters. Others stretched out on blankets, rubbing healthy doses of sun block into legs and shoulders. For the sun's rays penetrate, and precautions must be taken. Think on this; anytime we place ourselves before God's Word--reading or listening—the Word penetrates. Like the sun. It gets under our skin and begins working on us. Today, we listen in on a portion of one of Jesus final prayers. To be precise, this is the last prayer the disciples will actually hear from Jesus. Hours from now Jesus will pray, "O Father, let this cup pass from me--yet not my will but yours be done." But the disciples are asleep, and miss that prayer. On the cross, Jesus breathes, "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*" But the disciples have long since fled, fearing for their own safety. None are within the sound of his voice.

So this is the final prayer the disciples actually hear from Jesus' lips. You and I do well to listen closely, for we are caught in its sweep. This is Jesus' prayer for disciples of his day or today. Both are precious. He takes us in, lifts us before God. The crucifixion is hours away. Jesus knows he will be leaving this world, and he prays on behalf of those who remain. The words are a window into our Savior's heart, encouraging us to confidence and hope. Three specific dimensions we consider: Jesus' Prayer for Our Protection, Our Holiness and Our Mission.

**First, Jesus prays for our protection.** John 17:11f... "*While I was with them--the disciples--I protected them in your name...And now, I am no longer in the world. But they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them, keep them... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one...*"

“Protect them from the attacks of the evil one”. Know this: If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a target on your back, and all those forces at work in the world opposed to God delight in taking aim. Evil knows our weaknesses, what buttons to push: "How can I drive a wedge of discouragement deeper into this one's soul?" "How can I magnify the doubts of this individual, capitalize on the hopelessness of this situation, zero in on this temptation?"

Jesus knows that his followers are not immune from the world's brutality. Neither was he. What he endured, we face. "Protect them, Father." Protection comes in many forms: a friend or stranger who listens, or someone who has traveled a similar path, and has emerged intact. A reserve of strength you did not know you had flows through you. You hear a song, or a story, or a passage of scripture, and you know that God is near. Despite all that the world may throw our way, it is bedrock certainty that God is for us, and has given his Son to die for us so that we might will never know life apart from Him. Jesus prays our protection.

Another form of protection Jesus prays for us is the confession we build into worship. Did you ever think of this as a form of protection? We lay our failures before God, expressing remorse, casting ourselves upon God's mercy. Then we hear the promises of scripture, receive forgiveness, and start afresh. The confession is not intended to beat us up, focus upon our failings, but to reorient us, call us back to God. Where else do you go in the course of the week that asks this of you? A restaurant? "A ham and cheese sandwich and an iced tea, please."

"Certainly, after you confess your failings." Shop-Rite? "Before I ring up these groceries, sir, I need acknowledgement that you are going to live a more God-honoring life."

The church is where God's people gather, and acknowledge our dependence upon God. Because evil is still in the world, seducing, reminding, trapping us. Jesus prays a hedge of protection around us.

**Then, Jesus prays for our holiness.** Verse 17: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Sanctify them. Sanctification means to be made holy, more like Jesus. If you have ever desired that for yourself, know that Jesus desires and prays that for you. Any time we place ourselves before God's Word, that Word penetrates into our souls like the sun, shaping the way we live and think. Holiness happens as we place ourselves before God's Word. That is what Jesus is saying here: "Sanctify them in the truth, God; your word is truth." We do not make ourselves holy; that is the Spirit's work. We open doors for the Spirit to move.

You and I may be doing a world of wonderful things: mission projects and stocking food pantries and serving and caring, writing checks to noble causes, volunteering. These are noble and vital. But there is nothing specifically Christian about them. You need not be a follower of Jesus to practice them. Civic organizations and Rotary clubs and school groups assist many people. *Jesus' prayer is for people of faith not to limit holiness to doing good things, but to being holy--in our souls, in the privacy of our minds, when no one else sees--in our habits and practices.* Our greatest freedom in life comes not from doing as we please, but serving as God pleases.

"Your word is truth," Jesus declares--a call for us to tend our souls, to pray and to worship, to give scripture a chance to work on us. If you are living on a starvation diet of Bible-reading, or looking for a preacher to accomplish a spiritual wonder in your life via a 20-minute message, then spiritual growth will come mighty slowly. Jesus' prayer is for us to be in the Word. "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Jesus prays, "Now they (we) know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them..." Repeatedly in this short passage Jesus speaks of giving. Both God the Father and God the Son are extravagant givers. Jesus gives us his words, he gives us himself. Christ followers understand that Jesus was not just a bit of God stuffed into a human. He is the fullness of God; God made flesh. "*I am praying on their behalf, O God, because they are yours.*" We belong to God, and Jesus prays for an increase in our holiness. Remind yourself of that remarkable truth, and build upon it; hold it close.

The third dimension is Jesus' prayer **for our mission.** Verse 18: "Holy Father as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world...May they also be sanctified in truth."

Jesus moved through life with a deep sense of mission. Since before time began Jesus lived in deep communion with God. But a moment in history arose when, in complete obedience to God, Jesus entered into history to share our life. Repeatedly Jesus says that the Father has sent

him for a purpose: to bring people truth about who God is, and who we are, and who we can become, and about the meaning and preciousness of our lives. He was sent to reveal God's character and purpose. "For this reason I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth." "If you have seen me," Jesus said, "you have seen God. I and the Father are one." It was statements like this that got Jesus killed.

Sometimes Jesus described his mission in the form of service. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus came to do for others, to respond to needs, to expend himself on our behalf, even to death...all this with a compelling urgency.

Now he prays to the Father, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."---to bear witness to God and his presence even in the midst of dire circumstances. To be a servant people. Those seeking prominence and personal glory learn that glory is found in humility, in quiet obedience and devotion.

Part of our mission is to rub shoulders with those who feel that they do not matter to God, or those who do not care—God seems so distant and remote--and those who feel abandoned, or those who have made poor choices, or who simply feel that faith makes no difference. To labor and to serve and to pray and to be diligent, and to provide a glimpse of the Savior by our words and our actions. Not as some sort of project, but out of grateful love for the One who has sent us. That is the mission to which Jesus calls us, and I pray that it makes our hearts beat faster.

"I am no longer in the world," Jesus says, "but they/we are," often feeling very much on our own, wishing Jesus were here. And yet, Jesus is present, investing all that he has in us, the body of Christ. To quote Teresa of Avila, one of our spiritual ancestors:

*Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours;  
yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out on a hurting world,  
yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good;  
yours are the hands with which he is to bless now.*

That is enough for us to chew upon today. Protection, Holiness, Mission. We close with this prayer: Holy God—in this precious time we pause and gather to hear your word—to do so, we break from our work responsibilities, and from our play fantasies; we move from our fears that overwhelm and from our ambitions that are too strong. Free us in these moments from every distraction, that we may focus to listen, that we may hear, that we may change; through Christ. Amen. (from the prayers of Walter Bruggemann)

**Now may the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen.**