Today, I think all of our thoughts are focused on the future. Focused on the future because we know there are some big changes ahead. I know my family and I are going to encounter some pretty big changes – a new ministry in a new place. We’ve already have encountered some changes now as we prepare to leave the place we’ve called home these last 5 years and the people we’ve come to care so much for. Big changes for St Matthew too, as you as a congregation plan for the future. What will that look like? How will that go?

Change can be exciting, it can be sad, it can make us anxious. And as I’ve discovered over the last few weeks, it can do all of that at the same time. That’s one of the reasons why I’m glad that my last sermon here at St Matthew is on Jesus words to us in John 17.

Today as we read from John 17, we read some words that calm our anxious hearts. Words that Jesus prayed in confidence to his heavenly Father about you and me as members of the Holy Christian Church. The night before he died, Jesus prayed this prayer for us. You were on your Savior’s mind as he went to the cross, and you still are! You still are, as Jesus continues to intercede for you every single day as he sits in glory at his Father’s right hand. Listen to Jesus’ prayer as we turn to John 17.

**“I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message. 21May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. 22I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one: 23I in them, and you in me. May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see my glory—the glory you gave me because you loved me before the world’s foundation. 25Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these men knew that you sent me. 26I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have for me may be in them and that I may be in them.”**

These words take place the night before Jesus died. He’s in the upper room with the disciples. Judas had already left to betray him. And the very last thing Jesus did before leaving to go to the garden of Gethsemane was to pray this prayer, in the presence of his disciples. In the first part of the prayer, Jesus prays for himself. That he will glorify his heavenly Father by completing the work of salvation that he came to do. In the middle part of the prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples. That they would be protected from the devil and strengthened for what was coming.

In the third and final part of the prayer, which are our verses today; Jesus prays for all believers – he prays for you. **20“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message…”**

This verse shares a few important truths with us. First of all this verse very clearly shows us that Jesus is praying for us. Christians of 2022, and Christians of all time. Why? Because we believe in Jesus Christ through the message the disciples shared. God’s Word. Which brings us to the other truth, which we need to be reminded of our entire lives. **Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** I can’t bring myself to faith, the Holy Spirit works and strengthens that faith when I hear the gospel. When I hear that gospel message the disciples shared. Now might be 2000 years later, but we’re still saved the same way. By God’s grace, through faith. Jesus’ prayer is for you.

And what does he pray for you? **21that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.**Jesus prays for a unity of believers. That they be one. When we confess our faith using the Words of the Nicene Creed, there’s one line in there where we confess this prayer was answered. “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church.” The existence of the Holy Christian church, created and preserved by means of the gospel is really God’s answer to Jesus’ prayer. Maybe you remember from your catechism days the definition of the Holy Christian Church –it’s made up of all believers of all time. People from every language and tribe and nation and generation. Different cultures, backgrounds, social standings, different lives. So many differences, and yet united, one – one holy Christian church. How can people so different still be united? Because the faith in the Savior is one and the same.

St Paul describes it like this **“You are fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

One building with Christ as the cornerstone. One body with Christ as the head. One holy Christian church, that you are a member of by faith in Christ. Jesus’ prayer for you and for all believers is that you keep that unity. That the church’s one foundation remains Jesus Christ, her Lord.

That hymn that was sung at my first Sunday here and today at my last, shares an important truth with us. That Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. It’s a beautiful and very fitting illustration. The cornerstone is the most important stone of the house. All of the other stones conform to that stone. If you don’t have that cornerstone, the house you’re building is going to be a mess. The same thing is true for the Holy Christian Church. We always need to have Jesus to be our cornerstone otherwise we don’t have a foundation. We would have nothing to build our hope on, nothing to unite us! The way that the members of the Holy Christian Church stay unified with each other – is because the unity of the church finds its center in Jesus.

That’s the first part of Jesus prayer for you. Stay connected to Jesus. Members of St Matthew, that it my prayer for you too. That you always stay connected to Jesus. There’s a reason Jesus talks about us like plants, right? I am the vine you are the branches. Without that connection there isn’t any life. Without Jesus there isn’t any eternal life! We always need that connection to him. But staying connected to him isn’t always easy.

In Scripture, God reminds us we have the three big enemies against us. The first one is the devil. The devil doesn’t just give up once you’ve been confirmed, or because you’re a member of a church. If anything, that just means he’s going to be trying harder than ever to break that connection. To not feed your faith as regularly by coming to worship or reading the bible. To try to convince you that the sins you commit aren’t really a big deal, even though God tells us even one sin not forgiven through faith is enough to separate us from him. Or to think that your sins are so big and nasty that Jesus wouldn’t want to forgive them anyway.

The next big enemy we have is the sinful world around us that doesn’t understand sin and grace. We are surrounded by a culture that doesn’t think sin is a problem at all. And in many cases sin is the way to go. Everyone’s doing, it just makes sense, what’s the problem?

And even if you could somehow get away from these first two enemies, the last enemy is you. Your sinful nature, that fights against what God says, that hates everything God wants, and will never stop trying to wrestle you away from your Savior.

It’s not going to be easy to stay connected to Jesus. In fact, we look at our lives, the things we do every day, the things we’ve said. The things we’ve thought, the actions we’ve done, and we see how these three enemies, including ourselves, regularly get the better of us. We compare those actions with God’s law and what do we see? God’s law, shows our sins. It shows how we have fallen short and it reminds us of what we deserve. The wages of sin is death. How on earth can we stay connected to Jesus when we have all of this stacked against us?

Look at who we have for us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where the law cuts us to the heart and shows our sins, the gospel bandages us back up and reminds us we are forgiven. The gospel shows our Savior.

See what your Savior Jesus has done for you. He lived the perfect life you couldn’t and completely paid for your sins by his death on the cross. He is your atoning sacrifice, he makes you “at one” with God because nothing is hindering your relationship with him anymore. He defeated the power of the devil so that the devil can’t accuse you anymore. He has made you a new creation through the waters of baptism. Gave you a new man that wants what God wants. And because Jesus rose on Easter morning and lives forever, you will do that too. In fact, that’s part of Jesus prayer today for you. **“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory,”**

Jesus went to the cross for you so that his prayer for you could come true. In heaven we will enjoy the glory of God forever. We will be brought to complete unity there with our Savior as the one Holy Christian Church. No longer any devil, world or sinful nature to get in the way. And the Savior who prayed for you the night before he died continues to pray for you now at his Father’s right hand. That you stay connected with him as a member of the Holy Christian Church. That you stay focused on the goal of heaven no matter what stage of life you’re in. And that you continue to strengthen your relationship with your Savior.

Left to ourselves this would be absolutely impossible. But our Savior who rules in our hearts by faith enables the impossible to happen. He has promised you your sins are forgiven. He has promised nothing will snatch you out of his hand. He continues to pray for you every single day and through every stage of life. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let that be your comfort and joy as you look to the future. Amen.