

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** John 17:6-19

*<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, <sup>8</sup> for 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. <sup>9</sup> I 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. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> 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 in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup> I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

In an article written for Guidepost Magazine, titled, "The Power of a Mother's Prayer," Pablo Diaz shares these thoughts.

"Prayer is a powerful force for good. Many Mothers are praying warriors. They know there isn't a problem, issue or situation that God can't handle. My mother embodied this spirit. She taught us the power of prayer.

If we were sick, she prayed for our healing. If we had financial problems, she prayed for God's provision. When a decision had to be made, she prayed that God would guide our footsteps and help us not lean on our own understanding.

As a child I often would find my mom on her knees asking God to bless her family, marriage and children. While doing household chores, she prayed silently as she washed dishes, mopped the floor or cooked.

Early in my preaching ministry, my mom prayed, "Lord bless my son and give him the words that can lift up others." Today, she continues to pray for our family without missing a need. She knows the truth of James 5:16, that the fervent prayers of the righteous are powerful!"

Pablo says later that he is reminded of the lyrics to "A Mother's Prayer" sung by Celine Dion that powerfully express the heart of his mother and hopefully every mother:

*"I pray you'll be my eyes  
And watch her where she goes  
And help her to be wise  
Help me to let go*

*"Every mother's prayer  
Every child knows  
Lead her to a place*

*Guide her with your grace  
To a place where she'll be safe*

*"I pray she finds your light  
And holds it in her heart  
As darkness falls each night  
Remind her where you are*

*"Every mother's prayer  
Every child knows  
"Need to find a place  
Guide her with your grace  
Give her faith so she'll be safe*

*"Lead her to a place  
Guide her with your grace  
To a place where she'll be safe*

Pablo finishes by saying, "My mother's prayers shaped me in more ways than I will ever know."

In today's scripture text, we hear Jesus praying specifically for his disciples. This was not a prayer for the world. The "world" in John's gospel, William Barclay tells us, "stands for 'human society organizing itself without God.'" We know from other scripture texts, such as, John 3:16, that God so loved the world, that he sent his one and only Son into the world to save all who will believe in him.

God's plan to save the world he loved, began with Jesus, but it also includes those who will continue the work of Jesus to lead others to salvation after the ascension of Christ to once again be by His Father's side. This prayer, intended for Jesus' disciples, indirectly also is a prayer for the world, in that, his disciples will go into the world to take the message of salvation to the lost.

Jesus says here that his disciples were chosen and given to him by God. We hear him say that in verse 10, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them." Jesus protected them and taught them through word and example. He gave them all the tools they needed to continue the mission he began, and he saw that they were already putting what they learned to good use for Jesus' sake.

Even so, sadly, he already knew that one in the group, Judas, would be tempted and lose his way. Surely, he knew others in the future would lose their way too.

Jesus knew this would not be an easy task, especially after he was no longer with them. He knew that resistance against them was already building. I don't know if they realized this was happening, but Jesus did. He said, "the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." The witness through the way they lived and through their teachings, and because of their association with Jesus rubbed many people the wrong way.

The disciples' witness pointed out their fallen ways, their sinfulness, and called them to change so-as-to return to Godly living. Chances are that we would be lost members of this world, participating in the evil of this world were it not for those like Jesus, his disciples and the many, many disciples since then that lived in this world, but did not belong to it. They carried on

through their words and deeds the Gospel message and the opportunity for salvation through Christ.

Jesus, aware of the challenges that loomed in the future for his disciples, took his concern for them to God. In essence he dedicated the disciples to God and asked for God's guidance and joy to be within them, and His protection from the evil one to be over them. Note, that he never asked God to take them out of the world. He never prayed for them to escape the pain and challenges they may face. He prayed that they might find victory, joy, in knowing they were living with and for the Lord. Joy is found in pleasing God and shining the light of Christ into the darkness of the world, doing something offering hope and making the world a better place, and giving others the invitation to know Jesus and the love of God.

In verse eleven, Jesus prayed for their unity. He knew that with him gone from them, they were going to need each other to lean on for support, furthering their understanding of Jesus' teachings and continuing spiritual encouragement. He knew that for them to effectively continue his mission they were going to need to work together, even as they went in different directions. They were bound by their unity in Christ and his teachings wherever they went, which made their message, their light pointing the way to Jesus, to the world powerful and effective.

Have you ever wondered what makes the difference between a spotlight and a laser beam? How can a medium-powered laser burn through steel in a matter of seconds, while the most powerful spotlight can only make it warm? Both may have the same electrical power requirements. The difference is unity.

A laser can be simply described as a medium of excited molecules with mirrors at each end. Some of the excited molecules naturally decay into a less excited state. In the decay process they release a photon, a particle of light. It is here that the unique process of the laser begins.

The photon moves along and "tickles" another molecule, inviting another photon to join him on his journey. Then these two photons "tickle" two more molecules and invite two more photons to join the parade. Soon there is a huge army of photons marching in step with each other.

It is this unity that gives the laser its power. A spotlight may have just as many photons, but each is going its own independent way, occasionally interfering with other photons. As a result, much of its power is wasted and cannot be focused to do any useful work. However, the laser, because of its unity, is like an army marching in tight formation and is able to focus all its power on its objective. In like manner, disciples, united with each other through their bond with Jesus, bring a powerful light into the world, a light that cannot be ignored.

This prayer offered by Jesus is inspiring and empowering for all disciples of Christ. Jesus, looking ahead to all the disciples yet to come, offered this prayer for them too. That includes present day disciples, people like you and me who have received Jesus into our lives. That means disciples are still given by God to Jesus. The Holy Spirit, who is one with God, the Father and Jesus Christ, moves in our hearts, opening to us the opportunity to make a choice to follow Jesus and join his mission. That's how the disciple's journey begins.

Our lives, then fed by Jesus' teachings and example, nurtured by worship and encouraged by the unity of community with other faithful believers, gives Jesus the opportunity to reach out through us. Our words and actions point others to Jesus, and it brings honor to God, which in so doing brings us joy.

Sisters and brothers, Jesus knew believing in him and being a disciple as we live each day in this world would not be easy. He knew we would be attacked on all sides by evil, creating doubts, tempting to fulfill our desires for self-preservation and selfishness, undermining our

loyalty to God with idol worship manifested through materialism and power, using our emotions as a weapon to tell us we are unworthy of love and acceptance unless we join the ranks of the world. Jesus knew all of this, and he prayed for us.

Jesus sees these things before us even now and continues to pray for us. Jesus prays for you; Jesus prays for me. **Let that sink in for a while.** Just as a loving God-fearing mother prays for her children, Jesus takes us before His Heavenly Father, our Creator and God, and he prays for us. We are special. Special seems too inadequate a word when I think about Jesus praying for us. As disciples we also recognize that we are necessary for getting the message across to others that they are special too.

Jeff Calendar's three-year-old daughter along with the rest of her family was observed opening Christmas packages. As is often the case, Jeff's wife had recycled some bows from previous times, and their daughter grabbed one and then placed it on top of her head. The old tape left on it caused it to stick to her hair. That sight caused everyone to begin laughing, which excited her. In the midst of their laughter, she cried, "Look, I'm a present!" [And, in the end, aren't we all? On the other hand, are we 'a present' worth keeping and using in the Kingdom of God?]

Indeed, Jesus believes we are otherwise, why would he pray for us? Amen.