

7th Sunday of Easter May 16, 2010

John 17:20-26 ðJesus Prays for Me!ö

Christianity, and the Christian witness, grew strong and spread around the world after Christ rose from the dead. You would think that the world would become a better place after all this time, but sin also is still going strong and too often is our society's choice. Truly, faith in Christ calls for change in us, but not everyone wants to make the changes that repentance brings. So while Christ is working constantly to bring people to complete unity and oneness with God, the world, that does not know God, resists the enlightenment and change that is required. So in our text today we meet Jesus who is praying for everyone who, like us, will one day believe in him so that at least they will be brought to the complete unity and oneness that God desires of us. Furthermore, Jesus prays that we will come to heaven and witness with our own eyes the resurrected Christ in all his heavenly glory. And certainly, we can see Christ's glory right now when we come together around God's Word where the Holy Spirit is busy working to finish what Christ has already begun in us. Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed. Alleluia!)

God' Three-Stage Plan

There do seem to be three stages to God's plan for us in Jesus Christ. First, God was determined to accomplish the world's salvation through Jesus. This plan of God was planned from eternity before the creation of the world. He saw his creation of the universe, the earth, the land and the waters, the vegetation, the animals, and people. He saw in advance Adam's naming of the animals and the desire to have someone like himself. He saw himself take a rib from Adam and form a woman and breathe life into her. He saw his bringing her to the man so they became united as one - husband and wife. He saw the temptation by the devil, the eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and their spiritual death. God also saw a plan for their forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ. Although God had created Adam and Eve to be in unity with God, their sin brought disunity. So Jesus prays in the upper room before his death for the restoration of this unity:

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (v. 23)

God could not just say to Adam and Eve, ðI forgive you.ö God's holiness did not permit their sin to go unpunished. ðThe wages of sin is death.ö Their sin, their lack of holiness, their spiritual death all separated them from a holy and powerful God. The unity they enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden was broken, and so God shows this change by evicting them from the garden. The holy God cannot condone the sin of disobedience, and this one sin set off sin in all generations of people who are born as sinners and who commit their own sin through their actual sins of thoughts, words, and deeds.

At the same time that God must separate himself from us because of our sin, God's love for us does not permit him to have nothing to do with. It is in the heart of God to love us and all he has made, although we are sinners. It is in God's heart to desire that all people be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. It is in God's heart to find a way to get his dearly loved creation out of the mess we got ourselves into.

Therefore, both God's love and God's holiness must be satisfied, and so God made the decision before we were created to send his own beloved Son to be the messenger and the message. The second person of the Holy Trinity would enter into our world underneath the skin of a child, Jesus. He would perfectly obey the commandments, he would enter into his ministry at 30 years of age, he would submit to the waters of John's baptism, he would announce that the kingdom of God was near, and he would begin to teach the people about God's love, of righteousness, and of salvation. He began to declare the necessity for himself to suffer and die and to rise again on the third day. He would be the atoning sacrifice for sin. He would take the punishment fallen humanity deserved. He would give himself as a substitute to the world at the cross so that, after his death and resurrection, God was free to freely love and forgive us.

Status: Completed, for Christ's ascension to heaven indicates his work to save us is accomplished.

Step 2 – Christ, who is our salvation, is praying that we will see his glory

Now that Christ has accomplished step 1 in God's plan, he has moved on to stage 2. Christ, who is our salvation, is praying that we will see his glory:

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." (v. 24)

This is wonderful news for us because it shows that heaven is indeed open for us in Jesus Christ. God's love for you is so great that the plan the whole time was that we could spend eternity with God in heaven. But even though Christ has opened up heaven for us, there is a way to approach God that we must follow.

First, we must see and acknowledge our sin. Sin includes disobedience of the commandments and also spiritual ignorance of who God is in Jesus Christ. The whole world is separated from God because of such sin, so it is only in acknowledging the spiritual problem we have that we can receive the cure. Those who reject Christ and his work, and who disregard the importance or reality of sin, will remain dead in their sins. It is just as Paul writes, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and "There is no one righteous, not one." Sin is attractive to people, and so they continue to sin without escape. There is no escape from sin. That is why it is important for God to open our spiritual eyes to see the sin that separates us from him.

Then after we acknowledge our sin, we must then see with faith eyes and believe in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. For when the law has been preached to us that shows us our sin, then God's message of the crucified, risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ becomes more real and personal to us. It tells us our guilt is taken away and placed on Jesus. It says we are forgiven and are recreated as God's holy ones with Christ's righteousness. Those who come to repentance and faith in Jesus receive the forgiveness he earned for us at the cross. This is God's desire for the entire world, so that all people come to the knowledge of the truth and so be saved.

Finally, when believers in Christ leave this life, they go in spirit to be with God in heaven as they wait for the resurrection of the dead, and they will witness with their own eyes what the eyes of faith have always told them – that Christ is risen from the dead as he said. John writes in Revelation, "Every eye will see him." We look at Jesus now in faith, but then in heaven we will see his resurrection glory with our own eyes, the glory he had with the Father and the Holy Spirit before creation.

Status: Pending, as we wait for God to bring us to himself in heaven.

Step 3 – The Holy Spirit will finish in us what Christ has already begun

This brings us to stage 3 in God's plan. Having seen that God's plan for our salvation is accomplished in Jesus Christ, and hearing that Christ is praying that we will come to heaven and see his resurrection glory, what is left is for the Holy Spirit to finish in us what Christ has already begun. As Jesus prays to the Father in heaven, he states this about God's plan:

"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (v. 26)

Jesus has given his Word and Sacraments to us so that we can have a foretaste of God's glory. The Bible is the story of God's plan for our salvation from beginning to end. This Word has the power to create faith in people. This weekend little Jack Griepentrog comes to the waters of baptism in order that he might have a foretaste of God's glory in Jesus Christ. He receives the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation, just as we do, so that we are ready at all times for Christ's heavenly kingdom. So when we use God's Word and Sacraments now, we are experiencing what heaven is like. We see God's love, his open arms, and his heavenly glory.

This same Word and Sacraments is completing in us what faith began. The Holy Spirit works through them to make our faith stronger and more confident in Christ. The Holy Spirit also works through this Word to lead us to an obedient life to keep the commandments, which is the will of God for us. As this Word builds us up in faith, it also equips us to be bold witnesses to others so that they can know forgiveness of sins and salvation in Jesus. This same Word is uniting us as one with God and with each other.

Status: Currently in Process

Though the world does not know Jesus, we do. We did not learn about Jesus when a thought came into our head one day. We learned about Jesus when we were taught. So also it is for the world. People cannot know Jesus apart from the Word of Christ. But Jesus is praying for our success in coming to heaven to see his glory, and he has given his Word and Sacraments to keep us in this Christian faith so that we are brought to oneness and complete unity with each other, and with God – now, and in the life to come where we will see Christ's resurrection glory with our own eyes.

soli deo gloria