

Jesus' Prayer

John 17:6-19

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. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 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. 9 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. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 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. 12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

Somebody Prayed for Me

Dorothy Norwood, The Georgia Mass Choir

Somebody prayed for me, had me on their mind,

They took the time and prayed for me.

I'm so glad they prayed

I'm so glad they prayed for me.

My mother prayed for me, had me on her mind,

She took the time and prayed for me.

I'm so glad she prayed

I'm so glad she prayed for me.

The preacher prayed for me had me on his mind,

He took the time and prayed for me.

I'm so glad he prayed

I'm so glad he prayed for me.

Songwriters: Dorothy Norwood, Alvin Darling

This song debuted in 1994, was written by Dorothy Norwood and Alvin Darling, and was performed by Georgia Mass Choir. The website says they performed for 4:31 minutes. However, at our congregation in Detroit it went on for much longer. Each choir member wanted to take their term singing a verse, so it continued until everyone sang a solo part! But isn't that the way it is...we each want someone to pray for us...whether it is when we are sick, depressed, lonely, or in some other challenging time in our lives.

Throughout the ages, commentators have observed the human race is perilously perched between two worlds: "neither beasts nor gods." Like the other animals, we are driven by our biological needs and subject to the physical environment; but unlike them, we have the capacity for complex rational thought and an unparalleled degree of ingenuity. Although we frequently allow ourselves to be ruled only by our appetites, we can rise to a level of forethought, creativity, and abundant gift-giving that aligns us very closely with God.

This likeness is underscored by the Christian description of humanity as created in the image and likeness of God. This suggests communion and fellowship is properly directed toward one another and toward God, whom we resemble; but we repeatedly fall away from such communion. We find ourselves drawn toward those elements of our nature that resemble those of most other animals (such as our attention to food, shelter, and sex) and even to elements that are below those of other species (such as our willingness to kill our own kind). If we are to return to right relationship with God, we will require divine assistance; and this is precisely what Jesus provides.

Our scripture is part of the "high-priestly prayer" that Jesus offers up in his role as mediator between God and humanity. He stresses his own close relationship with and resemblance to the Source, to whom he prays: "all mine are yours, and yours are mine" (v. 10); "we are one" (v. 11). Based on this biblical language, the

writers of the ancient church made strong claims about the identity (in power, significance, and nature) of the Father and the Son, and (later) of the Spirit as well. But because Jesus is one person with two natures (divine and human), he is able to bridge the gap between God and humanity; his close relationships, both to God and to human beings, provide him with special authority for bringing the gifts of God to the people of God.

As was noted in the message on last Sunday's reading, the Sixth Sunday of Easter, when Jesus instructed us to remain in His love, the inner life of God is the archetype for all our relationships—both with God and with one another. Jesus' relationship with his disciples mirrors that inner life, and our relationships with one another should have the same character: mutually supportive and nonhierarchical, giving space to one another and allowing others to live into full personhood within a loving community of care. ¹ Here, Jesus carries that analogy further, with respect to the concepts of revelation, providence, and sanctification.

First, Jesus has received knowledge from the Source and has passed this knowledge on to his disciples. Through his divinity, he participates in the inner life of God and has "firsthand" knowledge of God's nature and purposes; through his humanity, Jesus can provide some account of this knowledge to other human beings. Here, his knowledge of his own divine origin is emphasized ("that I came from you ... that you sent me," v. 8). This belief is the cornerstone of the Christian doctrine of revelation; it testifies to Jesus' divine authority, thereby authenticating his words and deeds as revelatory of God. Thus, even though Jesus prays this prayer at the approach of his own death, its claims are quite proper to Eastertide: like the resurrection itself, it testifies to the vindication of Jesus as God's agent, spokesperson, and beloved child.

Second, Jesus prays for God's providential care of the disciples. We often associate providence with foreknowledge or foresight, and it certainly does have

this meaning; its origin (and etymology) directs us back to the Latin words *pro* (for, fore, before) and *videre* (to see). Theologically speaking, providence has a wider range of reference; it includes God's guardianship, benevolence, and loving care. The word shares the same root as "provide" and "provision"; God's providence is closely related to God's commitment to make abundant provision for our needs. Essentially, Jesus is praying that God care for the disciples with the same loving care that Jesus himself has received.

Third, Jesus prays for sanctification or holiness. This language is often misunderstood as referring to the doing of good deeds, going above and beyond the call of duty, or trying to be "holier than thou." But the governing idea of holiness is that of being set apart—particularly for God's special purpose. Israel is a holy nation, not because it behaves better (see the Old Testament for counterexamples!), but because God has elected it to be a light to the Gentiles. Holy water is not fresher, purer, or cleaner than other water; it has simply been set apart and assigned a role that distinguishes it.

Jesus prays for the disciples to be "set apart" in this way because they must live in the world. The *kosmos* or world is a hostile place to those who would dedicate themselves to God; for this reason, those who remain in the world need to be set apart and to recognize the degree that "they do not belong to the world" (17:16). Jesus prays that his followers will be sanctified—made holy, set apart—so that they may bring the good news to the world. For although it is estranged from God, this is the same world that God loves and into which the beloved Son was sent (John 3:16). **David S. Cunningham**

So in His "high-priestly prayer," Jesus prayed for His disciples and us to have knowledge, truth, protection and sanctification. This prayer is also a model prayer in which Jesus is teaching his disciples in his transitional period of separation that was leading to the cross and resurrection, as well as the culmination of his earthly

ministry. As with the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is intentional in teaching how to pray to God and make intercession. It is also a "farewell prayer"; it conveys again His concern for the disciples and their mission in the world modeled in Jesus' relationship to God. Jesus is praying to God in this divine relational community, asking for God's presence and guidance as the disciples, now commissioned as future apostles, who are sent to the world to witness to God's love and unity. The disciples are in the world under God's protection (17:11); and God gives them abundant and eternal life. This is life in all its fullness and blessings: the life that comes from God and is the Word incarnate in the living Christ and witnessed in the world and human history (1:14; 17:2). These disciples are now called to a living faith in the world. The disciples are called, set apart, and sent into the world, as Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, in the midst of conflict and confusion. They and we are consecrated by the truth, trusting in faith in God's word (17:17-19). Believing and witnessing in the world means that we, the church, as a community of faith, are to live in a creative tension "in the world and not of the world." As a prayerful community, we are to take seriously our intercessory role, in solidarity with the victims of injustice and marginalization, while denouncing the root causes of these unjust structures and broken relationships through our active witness in the lives of people and in the world. **Carmelo Álvarez**

Jesus prayed for us long ago, and continues to make intercession on our behalf with the Father. We are to pray for one another and ask God for knowledge, protection and to be set apart to do ministry in His name.

Jesus prayed for me, had me on His mind,
He took the time and prayed for me.
I'm so glad He prayed
I'm so glad He prayed for me.

[David L. Bartlett (2013). Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Westminster John Knox Press. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]