

Wesley United Methodist Church

May 8, 2016

“When Jesus Prays”

John 17:20-26

We honor our Mothers today. Mothers make many sacrifices and we are very thankful for them. As someone has said, “The hand that rocks the cradle usually is attached to someone who isn’t getting enough sleep.”

It’s not easy being a Mom, even though we’re tired and worn out, we still love our offspring. There was a Mom who wrote to Reader’s Digest. She says it has been a rotten morning. Her three kids were wired and driving her crazy. Counting to 10 wasn’t cutting it, so to release her pent-up frustration, she walked into her bedroom closet, shut the door and SCREEAAMMED! It worked. Afterward she felt much better. Ready to face the rest of the day, she opened the door and was greeted by three terrified faces. “Mom,” said her five-year-old, “I told you there was a monster in that closet!” I’ll bet those three youngsters stayed away from that closet for a long, long time.

Being a mom isn’t easy, but it is the most important single job in the world. It is our moms, with help from our dads, to whom God entrusts our care until we are able to make it on our own.

Our Scripture for today comes from the Gospel of John, Jesus prays what has come to be known as the “High Priestly Prayer.” This is rather a lengthy prayer which begins with this verse, he prays for future believers. Listen how this portion of this prayer begins: “My prayer is not for them alone.” Here he is referring to his disciples. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message...” That’s us. So Christ is praying for his disciples and he is praying for those who will be reached through their witness. In the first generation of Christians all who believed in Christ did so through the witness of the apostles, whether directly or indirectly. And, that chain of believers continues even to this day. Christ prays for all who believe because of the testimony of those first saints, including us.

So, we know that when Jesus prays, he prays for us. You and I are included in this prayer. That should bring us some comfort. Scottish preacher Robert McCheyne put it this way, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”

What an incredible piece of information for us, Christ prays for us. In Hebrews we learn that Christ is still interceding with the Father in our behalf. Chapter 4 reads, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” To me that’s incredible good news. When we bring our requests to God, Christ is right along side us, interceding in our behalf.

There is a powerful Mother’s Day story that comes out of World War II and the horrific holocaust which took the lives of millions of people. It is the true story of Solomon Rosenberg and his family.

Solomon Rosenberg and his wife and their two sons as well as Solomon’s mother and father were arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. It was a labor camp, and the rules were simple: As long as you could do your work, you were permitted to live. When you became too weak to do your work, then you were exterminated.

Solomon Rosenberg watched his mother and father marched off to their deaths, and he knew that next would be his youngest son, David, because David had always been a frail child.

Every evening Rosenberg came back into the barracks after his hours of labor and searched for the faces of his family. When he found them they would huddle together, embrace one another, and thank God for another day of life.

One day Rosenberg came back and didn’t see those familiar faces. He finally discovered his oldest son, Joshua, in a corner, huddled, weeping, and praying. He said, “Josh, tell me it’s not true.” Joshua turned and said, “It is true, Poppa. Today David was not strong enough to do his work so they came for him.” “But where is your mother?” asked Rosenberg. “Oh Poppa,” he said, “When they came for David, he was afraid and he cried. Momma said, ‘There is nothing to be afraid of, David, and she took his hand and went with him.’”

It’s a sad story of a mother’s love for her little boy. Now, transfer that image to yourself and Christ, with Christ in the role of the mother. Fearfully you approach the throne of God. Why did I say fearfully? Because you know you are not all God meant for you to be. You have no merit at all to petition God for his love and mercy. But alongside you is one who has volunteered to stand with you, giving you comfort and confidence.

Jesus reassured us that we can come to God as any child can come to a loving parent. We can pray not as outsiders, but as God’s children, tenderly, honestly, and confidently. In our secret, whispered prayers, we are known so well that God, like a mother listening with her heart to her children, can finish our sentences.

In Jesus' prayer he makes a specific request in our behalf. He prays for our unity. That is where we draw our strength; we are bound together with one another and with him. Listen to his words, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you..." Important words: that all of them may be one.

In praying for us, not only did Christ carry us in his heart before the Father but he makes some special requests. The first of these is for unity. A divided church, in many ways is a scandalous church. Christ died for us that we come to have a relationship with God and one another. That's why we are known as the body of Christ.

The unity that he desires for his church is the same kind of unity he has with his Father. The real church is a body of men and women united to each other because they are united to Christ.

Do you remember that little folk song so popular in churches in the 60s? I learned it as a camp song in the 80s. It went like this,

"We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.
And they know we are Christians by our love, by our love.
Yes, they know we are Christians by our love."

The content of this little song comes directly from this prayer by Jesus. If you want to witness for Christ, the first thing you need to do is love your brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a family, his family. And Christ is the head of our family. We are in him as he is in the Father.