

St Gregory's Episcopal Church
Joyfully sharing the love and Gospel of
Jesus Christ with all God's children
480 South Beverwyck Road
Parsippany, New Jersey 07054
Seventh Sunday of Easter (A)

May 21, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

“The wonderful prayer”

The Holy Gospel according to

John 17:1-11

Jesus looked up to heaven and said,
“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son

so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. “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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from

you; 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. 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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.”

Please pray for us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Biblical scholar Andrew Lincoln suggests that indeed this prayer in our Gospel lesson for today is the Johannine equivalent of the Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6:9-15. John is one gospel that does not quote the Lord's Prayer as we know it, but Lincoln calls John 17:1-11, "the Lord's prayer transposed into a Johannine key...."

[Lincoln, Andrew T., *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (London: Continuum, 2005)]

The famous nineteenth century
evangelical preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon,
said,

“I have a great need for Christ;
I have a great Christ for my need.”

In my parish where I was the Rector for
24 years, we created a special 1:30 pm
Sunday afternoon service for the many near
homeless and homeless in our somewhat
impoverished urban community. This
service was always well attended. Two
people in particular who came to that regular
Sunday service still especially stand out in
my memory: one was a well-dressed man in

his mid-thirties who would come off and on, but who was one of the more regular folks in that congregation. I recall him saying he was unemployed but receiving disability, but I never heard why, and he didn't offer to tell me; he was rather quiet and somewhat withdrawn, but we could always call on him to be the usher to receive the offerings, which were not that much monetarily, but the offering was a very important part of that congregation's life and self-esteem; they were never treated as poor or needy, but most all of them came both to receive the Eucharist and the free nice hot lunch which always followed. But this man in particular

would never stay for the lunch. For three or four years he was there, as I said, a bit off and on, but one day I got a call from his sister who said he had died of kidney failure; she told me that was his disability and that he always knew his time on earth would likely be short. But she told us how important that worship service had been to him and that he had specifically asked for us to do his funeral, should he pass. And of course we did. The family was so appreciative. They said he always came home from church with new life in his eyes. As Jesus prayed for his disciples in John Chapter 17, Jesus was also praying for him,

through our ministry and through the Eucharist, and through giving him a regular task to do for that congregation as usher.

The second man I thought of was perhaps in his mid to early forties, and he was always quite outgoing but would come into the service sometimes quite a bit late, but he always wanted to sit on the front row and would stay there in rapt attention to the homily and the Eucharist. And he always had a wad of paper in his pocket that he would proudly pull out and put into the offering plate; the paper wad was filled with a few coins, and he always made sure the offering plate never skipped him. Jesus was

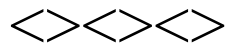
praying for him, too, through the prayers and the Eucharist; and his humble offerings of a few coins were the widow's mite. We never skipped passing the plate to him. And he too was lifted up by that worship experience, and he felt important in God's eyes which I believe he did not feel from much anyone else during the rest of the week when he was doing various odd jobs to get his small offering and to survive. We learned what Jesus was saying when he first announced in his first sermon to his home congregation in Nazareth, that he came to preach the Good News to the poor. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has

anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

Now you may not think of yourself as poor, maybe you have a steady income and/or even a good job or retirement, but as we come to Christ’s table we all come because of our spiritual poverty, even poverty known or unknown, and in our tithes and offerings Jesus hears even the groans of our hearts and answers our prayers. We are never left alone. Jesus prayed to his Heavenly Father for us nearly two thousand years ago, well in advance of all our needs. This is the prayer we hear in today’s Gospel lesson. It is sometimes

called the High Priestly Prayer, when the High Priest is praying specifically and directly to God for all those his Father in Heaven had given him as followers. We all come into God's presence with thanksgiving, but we all come with some unanswered needs. And here today, God is speaking to each of us in ways that help us on our life's journey, whether it be short or long. God is answering the prayers of his only begotten Son who prayed earnestly for us all in the context of the Last Supper. We are never alone in our needs; Christ hears us and takes our prayers to his Father's very ears. We all have direct access through the

Holy Spirit to the throne of God where our prayers are heard, and answered. In our silence we try to discern what is God's will.



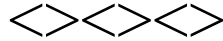
The Rev. Dr. Keith Wagner, Senior Pastor at St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Sidney, Ohio, [now Senior Pastor of McCullers Community Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina] wrote, and I paraphrase a bit: 'Because of our faith we will be tested, face overwhelming odds, and we will not always be accepted by the world in which we live. Why? Because as followers we won't sell ourselves out to the

ways of the world. It will be more important to help our neighbors than be successful.

Relationships with people will matter more than material things. Our language will be the language of love, and unlike the world in which we live we will make sacrifices and align ourselves with the oppressed.

‘That is a tremendous challenge and few will be able to embrace it. It will be easier to give into the ways of the world and look, talk, act and feel like everyone else. And yet, Jesus is counting on his followers to “keep the faith,” and be a presence in a world where some remain connected to the kingdom of God.’

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-176-19-different-world-wagner>



The Rev. Michael Sullivan, Rector of Holy Innocent's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia, wrote in 2011, a few years ago:

“The point of this out-of-order Gospel (it is placed in the Gospel of John probably as a part of the Good Friday, Last Supper, scene) Well, the point is that Jesus was serious when he called you and me. We know that call is paramount to discipleship; we fill our

churches with all kinds of programs and curricula to help us identify, understand, and respond to God's call.

Rev. Sullivan continues, “But over the last 14 years of my life in the church, the conversation about call has changed. And the conversation most of us are having is not pretty. This less than attractive discussion begins with a survey of the American religious landscape. Statistics from the Pew Charitable Trust, Gallup Poll, or Hartford Seminary tell us many things about the Church, things we don't want to hear. For these think tanks tell us that the call is no

longer experienced by a majority of Americans.

“Fewer and fewer people have any affiliation with a community of faith, and mainline denominations are shrinking at a rate that calls the future of these churches into question, all of them [together] accounting for less than 20% of the population.

“Worse yet, these gurus tell us no one is getting it right. Evangelicals bring people in the doors in record numbers only to watch them leave in record numbers, faster than their mainline counterparts. The stats are

hard to hear. The picture they paint is not affirming.

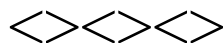
“But what these studies actually tell us is less about the death of the church and more about the future of it.

“I'm sure when the disciples heard the High Priestly prayer they turned to one another thinking this is not what we signed up for, this is not why I left my nets upon the shore, this is not why I have left my family. Hearing Jesus' words, accepting that the difficult hour had come, those were not words of comfort but words of change, accompanied by the fearful unknown.

Rev. Sullivan continues: “The beauty of this out-of-order Gospel proclaiming the cross in the midst of our season of resurrection, the beauty comes raging right back into our lives, right back into our calls when we hear Christ's words once again.”

<http://day1.org/2923->

[an_outoforder_lesson_calling_us_to_a_new_day](#)



A few years ago, in Portland, Oregon, two riders on a commuter train lost their lives defending a hijab-wearing woman and her female friend--probably both women

were Muslims, but their defenders were men. The women were likely going to an event beginning Ramadan, the most holy feast days on the Muslim calendar. The two men on the train were stabbed to death by a man who had been vociferously attacking the two women as they road on that train: the news report says he had been “shouting ethnic and religious slurs at two women”. When the two unarmed men tried to diffuse the situation in the train car, the man attacked them and stabbed them to death. Another man trying to help was also stabbed, but he lived, authorities said. Somehow police were notified, and they

entered the train station and arrested the knife-wielding murderer, whose family name was “Christian”. The two women dashed off the train and have not been located.

Reuters reported, “The attack on Friday afternoon unfolded hours before the start of Ramadan, Islam's holy month, when most of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims observe a daily religious fast.”

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-muslims-portland-idUSKBN18N080>

When Jesus was challenged by the religious authorities of his time for eating

and drinking with unclean, heathen, people, he said his father had called him to be a healer for the sick, not for the healthy. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). And what is the most anyone can do for another but to give their life for them? John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” The two Portland martyrs gave their lives for the one who killed them, the one whose name was “Christian”. They witnessed to him with their very lives that

his Savior and our Savior came not to kill and destroy but to heal and to save.

How do you see today's Gospel lesson giving us wisdom about our actions and the actions of others in this day and age? Are we just to thank Jesus for praying for us Christ followers? Are we only to feel comforted that Jesus thought of us and prayed particularly for us Christians some two thousand years ago?

Jesus in the last verse of today's Gospel acknowledges that his followers "are in the world." And Jesus innately realizes that we will need 'protection' since we will be under attack from (quote) "the world" (unquote),

or under attack by what the Greek writer wrote, under attack by “the (quote) ‘kosmo’, “the system”, even under attack by the entire cosmos of the universe of darkness which is ruled by the evil one, the satan, the devil. And Jesus ends this portion of his Gospel prayer by hoping we “may be one”, as he and his Holy Father are one.

Being “one” with Jesus and his Heavenly Father actually puts us at risk, sometimes, big risk. We do not have Jesus’ heavenly powers, or we usually go about our lives thinking we do not have Jesus’ miraculous abilities. But recall, Jesus even as the very Holy Son of God was crucified, died, was

buried, but then... he rose and ascended to heaven. Part of that process is evidenced by those who lose their lives to protect children of God who may at the moment adhere to another faith, even they are God's precious children whom God is calling to follow God's Son and not to remain in darkness.

The two Portland martyrs died also to protect another Christian as well as some who may yet be in darkness that maybe, just maybe, those who might one day find the light of Christ. The two martyrs remained united with Christ even against one who by name was supposedly united with Christ but who was possibly deranged or who maybe

was not united with his name's sake Jesus Christ. Those Oregon martyrs stood between everlasting condemnation and those not yet living in the light, that those who have not yet found Christ's light might one day find it and also become one with our Heavenly Father and God's only Son Jesus.

We Christians as observers of the martyrs are at this moment in training to become like them, perhaps hopefully not following in martyrdom, but who knows in these dangerous times. We are being called to a very holy and heavenly calling to bring light to a world that has not found the True Light.

May Christ's High Priestly prayer for his followers protect and guide us in whatever role Christ may need us to do boldly for him and his Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.

“The wonderful prayer”

Description:

Christ prayed for all his followers that they may be one as he and his heavenly Father are one. But he recognizes that we may be under attack and need his prayerful protection. So Jesus prays to his Father to protect us who are in the world of darkness.

[17]

Tags:

God, Jesus, Christ, martyrs, Portland,
Oregon, train, killed, Muslim, Ramadan,
holy, protect, prayer, praying, Spurgeon,
service, meal, Eucharist, Sunday, kidney,
failure, hijab, police, offering, offerings,
usher, food, meal, serve, protection,
darkness, world, cosmos, universe, high,
priestly, eternal, life, biblical, scholar, Mark,
John, Nazareth, poor, homeless, Spirit,
throne, kingdom, Episcopal, Atlanta,
Georgia, women, men

[Here follows several unedited snippets from my earlier sermons on this particular text of John 17:1-11:]

[1999]

So how does the Savior of the world spend his last hours of freedom? Jesus spends that time in teaching and prayer with his disciples. This prayer is set by our gospel in the Upper Room. It is an intimate prayer, it takes only twenty-six verses to recite what the disciples could remember of it. The first eleven verses are the portion in

our gospel lesson for today. In these verses Jesus appears to be self-centered and presumptuous, asking his heavenly Father to glorify him, Jesus. But if one reads on further, Jesus is praying for this glorification so that his disciples would be spared the cruel arrest and death he himself would be suffering soon. Jesus, in praying for his glorification would be spreading that glorification of himself to his followers. They too would be covered by God's Holy Spirit. Perhaps one day they also would find themselves either on a cross or at a block for beheading or flayed or some other horrible end. But for now Jesus saw the need, the

absolute necessity, for preserving the lives and spirits of those eleven disciples. Jesus surely realized there would be no escape for him, but he prays for the heavenly Father's protection for each of the Eleven. In their hands would be the future of the kingdom Jesus had initiated on earth.

What would you be doing if you realized your final hours were upon you? Some of us would be seeking one last ray of hope from the medical community. Others of us would slip into a haze of alcohol. Some would commit suicide, like Judas, or turn their wrath on someone else as they raged against death--the criminals on the crosses

beside Jesus did that. Of course one dying thief repented and turned his heart toward the Messiah in his last breath.

What would you do?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote his sister and his friends a number of letters when he realized his time in the World War II Nazi prison camp would probably be the end of his life. Dietrich wrote how the grace of God was “costly”, how we do not value that for which we do not pay for in some way. Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer called it.

Others wrote of a hope to come. One prisoner in another prison camp scratched on a stone wall in their prison their vision of a

time when the sky would once again be a place where one could fly away freely.

Others were less eloquent, but their memory still lives on in the lives of the relatives they left behind.



A story is told of former Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Arthur J. Burns, a Jew, who joined an informal White House prayer group in the late 1970's. The prayer group was predominantly composed of Christians. No one quite knew how to involve Arthur Burns in the group. At the end of each prayer session, one of the members would ask another member to

close the meeting with prayer. But Arthur was never asked, perhaps more out of respect than ignorance or prejudice. But then one week a newcomer unknowingly asked Burns to close the meeting with prayer. Many of the people there were a bit surprised and wondered what would happen. Burns, without missing a beat, reached out his hands and bowed his head, and the other participants instinctively clasped each other's hands and bowed their heads. Burns prayed, "Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ. I pray that you would bring Moslems to know Jesus Christ.

Finally, Lord, I pray that you will bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen."

What prayer is on your heart and in your mind now, today? Let that prayer have wings. God is listening to your prayer just as God listened to his beloved Son's prayer. Let your prayer arise. Great things will happen. Wonderful healings will occur. The world will be changed. And we too will never be the same.

[2008]

May we show our unity, Dear Lord, by loving one another. Amen.

Jan and I often visit more than one church when we are on vacation just to see ‘what’s going on out there’. This past month we were in Florida for a brief respite after Easter, and we discovered a large community church not far from our motel which we visited twice on Sunday, after having gone to the Eucharist at an Episcopal Church earlier in the morning. The morning service was fairly interesting due to the church’s large choir, rather, I should say,

enormous choir; but the sermon was not that powerful—the junior pastor preached. In the evening, however, there was only a small musical ensemble, but the senior pastor preached. And with great passion and fervor he preached that unity among Christians begins at home. It was a very personal and heartfelt message, in which he described a few times he and his wife, who was the church's dynamic pianist, had been at odds with one another just before they had to 'perform' at a Sunday service. He noted that if he and his wife couldn't reconcile, how could he expect that to happen within their own congregation. And I thought that

was a profound point. If my wife Jan and I can't agree on something, how can we expect others to go along with any particular idea? And to take the idea further, if we cannot agree on something within our own congregation, how can we hope to agree with say another congregation even within our own denomination? And, let me go one step further, if we can't get along in our own denomination, how on earth do we ever expect to bring about reconciliation with other denominations within Christianity? And if that can't happen among Christians, how will there ever be world peace?

Isn't it often true, that the people we most heatedly disagree with are living under our own roof, such as our spouses, or our significant others, and our children?

And when we pray for peace, if there is no peace at home, how on earth do we think God will respond to even our heartfelt prayers for the peace of the world peace?

Uh, oh. Have I hit a nerve?

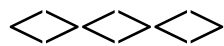
If the evangelicals can't get along with the Catholics, and the Pentecostals can't stand the Baptists, and the liberals can't tolerate the conservatives, how on earth or in heaven can we ever hope there will be peace on earth? There can't even be peace among

Christians! Or among Episcopalians, or among Anglicans, or, Catholics, Baptists, and so on.

No wonder Christ said there will always be wars and rumors of wars. Those wars often start and are carried out in our own living rooms! Or church parlors! Or with some other church 'down the street'.

I am of the opinion that if we can't live in peace locally, we can never live in peace nationally; and if we can't live in peace nationally, we can't possibly live in peace internationally. And it all starts right in our own homes, or in our own churches, or in our own denominations, and so on.

Jesus so foresaw this division among us Christians that he began praying for us two thousand years ago--talk about taking a long time to have a prayer answered! It is a prayer that seems to have 'no prayer' of being answered, and it was our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was praying that prayer for our unity, as he did in today's gospel reading in the last verse, John 17:11.



[2011]

May your name continue to protect and guide us, Dear Lord. Amen.

Pastor Garry Deverell, in a sermon he preached in 2002 to the South Yarra Baptist Community Church near Melbourne, Australia, said: “In his influential book, ‘After God: the future of religion,’ the [modernist] Cambridge England philosopher Don Cupitt argues that from now on we must view Christian faith as a fictional novel which human beings, alone, have authored. In this thoroughly modern schema, Luke’s Ascension story is cited as a one of the primary figures of divine abandonment.”

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<http://www.laughingbird.net/SYCB/SouthYarraBaptist/Home.html>

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<http://www.laughingbird.net/ComingWeeks.html>

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Pastor Deverell goes on to say: “Let me summarise what [the Gospel according to] Luke has to say like this. While, by virtue of the Ascension, Christ is indeed no longer present as a particular human being who occupies a particular place and time, he is nevertheless, also by virtue of the Ascension, more abundantly present and

active than he has ever been before. And this not as some kind of ghostly presence who hangs in the air but never takes form. No, says Luke, Christ is now present as the material body of Christian believers, brought into being and inspired by the very Spirit that made Jesus who and what he was. The Spirit now makes the Church what Jesus of Nazareth was, so infusing and shaping its life and work that the mission of Jesus continues in the Church as a real and tangible Christ-presence for the world.”

The first century church was possibly challenged for nearly a decade by the

problem presented to the readers of the book of the Acts of the Apostles which puts forth a specific timetable for the Resurrection and Ascension of the Risen Lord as being forty days apart (Acts 1:3), followed by the event of Pentecost which was fifty days after Easter—Pentecost comes from the Greek number “pentecontes” which means “fifty”. Thus the time between the Ascension and Pentecost would have been some ten days, and it could have been argued that God was simply absent to the believers for those ten days before relief came from the descending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. In fact today, in a way we are exactly in this ‘no

man's land' between the Ascension which we celebrated last Thursday and Pentecost which we will celebrate next Sunday with our spectacular Pentecost Potluck, the Lord willing!

Pastor Deverell's assertion that the "the Church" is "a real and tangible Christ-presence for the world" does not seem to explain the quandary the world faced according to the time table of the Acts of the Apostles. What happened between the Ascension and Pentecost?

For one, before Jesus' death Jesus had prayed for his disciples in the eloquent High Priestly Prayer in today's reading from the Gospel according to John, that God the Father would protect Christ's followers in his absence. And secondly, again if one reads the Gospel according to John, one finds that in this Gospel Jesus delivers the Holy Spirit onto his disciples on the evening following his resurrection on Easter morning in John Chapter 20, Verse 22. So according to John's timetable, which differs a bit from Acts, the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit before the Pentecost of the book of the Acts of the Apostles and before

Christ's Ascension into heaven. Yet, one could still point out that according to three Gospel writers the disciples were bereft between Good Friday and Easter; but instead to fill that "gap" we have this beautiful prayer in today's reading from the Fourth Gospel, John Chapter 17 citing Christ's concern that his followers never be left unprotected, a prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples just before he was crucified, a prayer that might be called the 'Prayer for the Gap'. Thus this prayer was a very crucial one for Christ's first followers, as well as for us in the Twenty-first Century. Jesus has prayed for our protection in God's

“name” in Verse 11, and in Verse 6 Jesus says he has made God’s “name” known to his followers.

What is the significance of God’s “name”? Why is God’s “name” important?

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray, “hallowed be thy [or God’s] name”, or “holy is God’s name” as a more contemporary version of the Lord’s Prayer would translate it. What is it about God’s “name” that is so important? In the Greek text of today’s Gospel, the Greek word “onoma” is used for “name”. And in the

Lord's Prayer, the same Greek word "onoma" is used for God's "name" in Luke 11:2-4, and Matthew 6:9-13. What is it about God's "name" that will give protection to us Christ followers?

In Psalm 91, Stanzas 14 through 16, God says, "I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation." (The Hebrew word "shemi" or "shem" is used in this Psalm for "name". "Shem" means a lofty appellation, as a mark

or memorial of individuality; and by implication indicating renown, honor, authority, character). <

<http://strongnumbers.com/hebrew/8034.htm>

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God's very name itself indicates God's ultimate authority over all things and also the honorability of God's fame which bears witness to God's infinite ability to do all things. God's name itself will guard and protect those who truly know God's faithfulness in all things. God's name is God's very identity, powerful and sure to help in any and all circumstances. Holy be God's name, as we pray in the Lord's

Prayer, a name and an ultimate power not to be trampled upon or treated lightly. So the Psalmist's comforting words are being echoed by our Lord on the night he was to be betrayed. Jesus himself needed God's protection, but he knew that even with his Heavenly Father's mighty protection he would still have to suffer terribly and even be murdered on the cruel cross. But God's protection is far greater than death itself, God protects us eternally so that even death cannot separate us from God the Father and God's Son Jesus Christ.

Christ's prayer for us is one that is unceasing, one that never stops, never ends. We are continuously in God's almighty arms of care, through thick and thin, in good times and in bad. So let that knowledge comfort us in all our trials and tribulations. God is with us always, so may we recognize our sacred specialness with the Lord. And let us keep that specialness holy and unspotted, quick to admit our frailties and transgressions, and even quicker to confess and amend our ways in the presence of our Holy Protector.

Some fail to see the power of God's name and instead appropriate some other entity, such as a saint, or the Mother of Christ, or some dead relative, or some angel, as their protector, but all these beings and people pail in the light of God's holy name and in fact tend to denigrate God's power, I think. Why pray to a lesser entity than God? We always have immediate access to God's very throne in heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ who sits at God's right hand, always interceding for us; we need to look no further. God's name is infinitely powerful, so let us never take it lightly.

The Third Commandment in Exodus

Chapter 20, Verse 7, says, “You shall not make wrongful use of the ‘name’ (Hebrew, “shem”)

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<http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Exd&c=20&t=NLT#conc/7>

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of the LORD your God, for the Lord will not acquit, or pardon, any who misuses his ‘name’ (again, in Hebrew, ‘shem’).” So in one sense Jesus in his High Priestly prayer I believe John may be hearkening back to the Third Commandment and framing it in such a way that we look more at what benefits we

gain from God's holy name rather than focus on the strict prohibition of the Third Commandment. We are to see God's 'name' as something, actually some one, a real entity who protects and guards us, a name which affirms the power, authority, and majesty of very God, our Father in Heaven. We need to seek no other; God's holy name is all we need, and we pray directly to God through his Holy Son Jesus Christ.

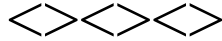
Several scholars have pointed out that this prayer of Jesus in John Chapter 17 is the "real" Lord's Prayer, the recollection of

Jesus closest followers of what Jesus prayed to his Father in Heaven. Even though the standard Lord's Prayer is the "model" Jesus gave to his closest followers, the one we hear from Jesus' lips in John 17 is a better example in some ways of how Jesus himself 'really' prayed. We are listening in to a very intimate prayer prayed within the Holy Trinity between the First and Second Persons of God. Jesus is bringing his disciples, and through them us ourselves, into the very presence of our Heavenly Father; here of all prayers we are hearing how concerned Jesus is for us, for our safety, for our salvation, for our very being.

Jesus is interceding for you and for me, for all of us, to his Heavenly Father, and by implication he is speaking through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Here the Holy Trinity in all its fullness is summoning itself to help us. Can we hope for any thing greater or better or more directly beneficial?

God loves us that much to protect us in all circumstances and at all times. We can confidently place our hand, our lives, in the care of the Almighty One who always hears our cries.

Blessed be the Name of the Lord!



[2014:]

May your Name continue to protect and guide us, Dear Lord. Amen.

Here is a report from a New York Times special headline from yesterday, Saturday, May 31, 2014: “[US Army] Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, was handed over to American Special Operations forces inside Afghanistan about 10:30 a.m. yesterday by a

group of 19 Taliban [soldiers], officials said.... American officials said that Sergeant [Bowe] Bergdahl was in good condition and able to walk.... President Obama personally telephoned the soldier's parents on Saturday, shortly after Sergeant Bergdahl was transferred to the American military.... Sergeant Bergdahl is believed to have been held by the militant Haqqani network in the tribal area of Pakistan's northwest frontier, on the Afghan border. He was captured in Paktika Province in Afghanistan on June 30, 2009. In January [2010] ... a video was obtained by the American military showing [Sergeant

Bergdahl] alert but also apparently in declining health.... One Defense Department official said that once Sergeant Bergdahl was safely aboard the American military helicopter flown to the rendezvous, [the Sergeant] wrote on a paper plate with a pen — because [the helicopter’s rotor] was so loud — ‘S.F.?’ [S F Question Mark] seeking to find out if the soldiers were American Special Forces [S F, for Special Forces]. One soldier yelled back, ‘Yes, we’ve been looking for you for a long time,’ at which point Sergeant Bergdahl broke down crying, the Pentagon official said.”

Can you imagine yourself in God's eyes, being returned from a very unfriendly foreign place, but whole, intact, never lost to God, never out of Jesus' sight? That is exactly the request Jesus was praying in his prayer to his Heavenly Father in today's Gospel lesson--that we never, never, ever, ever, ever will be left behind, lost, forgotten, overlooked, misplaced, or even separated from God's mighty hand, which is much stronger than any special ops of the army, navy, marines, or air force. We who are Christians will never be left without God's powerful protection.



In England many years ago I was driving in a rental car in the dark middle of the night on a narrow road between Bath and Wells. I was returning to my small room in Bath from a multi-denominational English church conference following almost three weeks of grueling work at the Lambeth Conference in Kent, England. There in Kent I had been the only US based American priest recording the discussions of one of the groupings of forty bishops. I was the secretary for Indaba D, one of the twelve or so groups of forty international Anglican and Episcopal Bishops that get together for the Lambeth Conference every ten or so years. My

group, of all the twelve Indaba discussion groups at that Lambeth Conference, was quite unique as it had as its members, three Roman Catholic Cardinals, yes, Roman Catholic Cardinals, most of whom spoke German and were personal friends of the Pope; plus the ultra-conservative English Archbishop of the Southern Cone [of South America], the liberal assisting bishop of Los Angeles, four very conservative Bishops from the Congo, and several other bishops of various and sundry very liberal and very conservative theological opinions from all over the world. There are more than seventy million Anglicans in the world, and from

them came over six hundred Bishops to this special program chaired every ten years by whomever is the Archbishop of Canterbury. For three long weeks the Indaba groups had been talking together and discussing a wide variety of theological and Biblical topics; in my Indaba there were four different languages being translated, simultaneously—French, Congolese, Spanish, and English. And those forty Bishops could not agree on anything, anything! The leader of one sub-discussion group in my Indaba reported that they all had read the same text from the Bible, and they were completely unable to come to any

consensus about what that Biblical passage was saying. And I as their Rapporteur, their Reporter, was somehow supposed to keep an ongoing written record of their discussions and agreements and disagreements and debates and report it back to the central group of clergy who had designed this monster, er ah, meeting of bishops and archbishops. It was quite a challenge.

After the conference was over I needed a brief time to myself just to clear my own mind. Wow! So I drove on the wrong side of the road, as the English do, up past Stonehenge, to this popular annual Christian conference held in a giant rural field

somewhat distant but still near the ancient Roman English town of Wells. There was no housing for miles around that conference so I had rented a small room in Bath, several miles away. On my way home from that conference one dark but moonlit night I was diligently following all the instructions of my handy dandy GPS, global positioning system, my GPS, when it suddenly told me to take a left turn in a hundred yards onto Dungeon Road, Dungeon Road, yes, “dungeon”, like a jail! I slowed my car down to a creep and kept looking and looking for the left turn, but there was none, absolutely nothing I could see in the pitch

dark but only by the light of my headlights at least. There were only big trees, tall grass, overgrown bushes, lots of vines, and nothing else I could see, so I continued on forward and somehow still arrived at my planned destination and my room in Bath, England. As I learned after coming past this mysterious Dungeon Road turn several nights later, there actually was an ancient road behind those bushes and grass that apparently led to an ancient dungeon, but the brush had so overgrown the little road that it was essentially invisible; indeed on my last pass by that place in the dark I did see two headlights heading from that non-existent

road up to my road. Someone else had apparently actually followed their GPS and had gotten onto that road somehow and had to turn around and come back to this main road. But even there in what I might call a ‘God forsaken place’ I could be assured by this prayer by Jesus to his heavenly Father in our Gospel lesson today that I was never out of God’s mind; I was never away from God’s watchful eyes, I was never separated from the presence of God’s wonderful Holy Spirit.



And at the Lambeth Conference those forty disagreeing Bishops and Archbishops

and Cardinals were trying their best to keep the Anglican and Catholic communions together, so that we could be one, as Jesus and his heavenly Father are one, as the last verse in today's Gospel says. Our unity was far more important than even how we read and understood the Bible, the Apostles Creed, or anything else. Our Christian unity was paramount in the end. And that Lambeth Conference, although it could not agree on much of anything at all, that Lambeth Conference was still considered enough of a success that one of the leaders of the design plan was later elected the

Bishop of Connecticut here in the US,
Bishop Ian Douglas (recently retired).

Our Bishops have a huge challenge today keeping their Dioceses together, believe it or not. And we as the Body of Christ in the world are charged by this prayer of our leader and Savior Jesus Christ to try to keep our parishes together regardless of how we each read and understand the Bible, or the Creeds, or just about anything else. Our Christian unity as those who put their faith in Christ is far more important than just about anything else we do. But this also means we need to respect other Christian churches and groups in order to keep this

Christian unity in our communities, in our Dioceses, and in our world. Our unity, our unity as believers, is what ultimately is the most God-like thing we have together, whether we are Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostal, whatever. Our differences, no matter how vast or distinctive, our differences are always to be subservient to our ability to work together and live together as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. That was Jesus prayer. That is Jesus prayer for all of us who believe in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, even if it is not so

catholic or completely or at all apostolic in our own eyes—all Christians are one in Jesus eyes and in the eyes of God the Holy Father.

So that is our charge today--to be one with one another; to overlook our differences, be they theological, Biblical, sociological, whatever, and live as one in God's Holy Spirit. We are to be one as God's Son and his Holy Father and our Holy Father are one.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.

