

Resurrection Unity

May 24, 2020

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Confirmation Sunday for Jaydyn Gaul

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John 11: 1-11 / 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Dear Christian Friends

Four weeks ago - Resurrection Conversations (Jesus on road to Emmaus)

Three weeks ago - Resurrection Abundance (I came that they may have life and have it abundantly)

One week ago - Resurrection Response (Keeping commands, repentance, and zeal for doing what is good)

Today Resurrection Unity, as we listen in on a portion of Jesus our Great High Priest praying for his disciples, that the Father would keep them safe and strong in their Christian faith, that they would be one mind, even as Jesus and His Father were of one mind.

It's a beautiful thing to know that someone is praying for you. My mom was like many of your moms in that she prayed for her loved ones on a daily basis. She didn't just pray for us in an occasional and haphazard way, but daily and with great passion. She told me more than once that she prayed for my sisters and me every day. She didn't just pray off the top of her head, she wrote down her prayers and then read them again and again. And if I close my eyes and think about it, I can hear her praying at my bedside with a soft and a gentle voice, the Lord's Prayer, Luther's Evening Prayer, and the Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep prayer. A mom and her son united by virtue of Holy Baptism, or to say it another way, "Resurrection Unity."

It's a beautiful thing to know that someone is praying for you. One of the privileges of living near four of our grandchildren is that on occasion, they stay overnight at our place. Especially the two granddaughters, Hope and Morgan. We watch Hallmark movies together, we play cards and we eat popcorn and we eat all the ice cream they want to eat, and then more often than not I will go up and say prayers with them at bedtime. What a privilege it is to be their grandpa and to pray for them to be strong in the Christian faith in all the chapters of life, and more often than not, I add a prayer for the young men they will be marrying some day. At which time they often start giggling and they are more than a bit embarrassed and once in a while they'll even say, "Grandpa, I'm not sure I'm ever going to get married." At which time I say, "Oh yes, you are, and since I'm not sure how long of a life I'm going to live, and since I absolutely want to be the pastor who officiates at your wedding, you need to get married by the time you're 25!" Grandchildren and a grandpa united by virtue of Holy Baptism, or to say it another way, "Resurrection Unity."

It's a beautiful thing to know that someone is praying for you. Imagine how the disciples felt on the night their Master and Teacher was to be betrayed and arrested. Not long before this prayer, Jesus had got down on his knees and carefully washed their feet, He had predicted

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that one of them would be betraying, he had given them a new commandment, that they would love one another in the same way he had loved them, he had predicted Peter's denial, he had identified himself as the way, the truth, and the life, he had promised not to leave them as orphans, promised that he would send the Holy Spirit, promised them that if they would remain connected to him, they would bear much fruit, he had warned them that the world would be hating and persecuting them in severe fashion, and now he launches into a lengthy prayer. Disciples united with their Savior by virtue of faith, or to say it another way, "Resurrection Unity."

It's a beautiful thing to know that someone is praying for you. In John 17, the disciples listen in as Jesus prays for himself to be glorified, He prays for His disciples to have a unity based on his death and resurrection, He prays for those who would believe on the basis of their testimony, that would be you and me and Christians in every generation. Later on this evening, Jesus would take three of the 12 with him in the Garden of Gethsemane and he would ask them to watch and pray with him, as you well know, they would be giving into the tiredness of the night and would be falling asleep, but for now they listened in.

The prayer we have before us today is called the High Priestly Prayer. In the Old Testament, there were three Holy Offices instituted by God, Prophets, Priests, and Kings. No one assumed these offices on their own. Only those called by God and properly appointed by the anointing of the Holy Spirit entered these offices. Although Jesus entered and fulfilled perfectly all three of those offices, it is the Office of Priest that occupies our attention here. It was a beautiful thing that Old Testament priests did on behalf of God's people. They mediated between man and God. They carried out their work at the Temple where they would take the sacrifices people would bring and present them to God on behalf of the people. There were certain rituals prescribed for thank offerings and for memorial offerings and then there were the sin offerings. How bloody and yet how beautiful it must have been for sinners to bring their animal into the temple, the priest would sacrifice it, he would throw some of the blood onto the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies and then throw some of the blood onto the sinner, and as he did so, he would say, "the Lord has forgiven you all of your sins." Did life get any better than that for Old Testament believers?

It was and is and ever shall be a beautiful thing for us to have Jesus as our Great High Priest. In his earthly life, he fulfilled the Law perfectly in our stead. Scholars call that His active obedience. At the cross, he offered up the once and for all sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven. Scholars call that passive obedience. And to this very day, Jesus intercedes on our behalf with His Father. John wrote it this way, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is absolutely concerned about the danger to which the disciples would be exposed when Jesus departs from and leaves them in this world. And so

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he intercedes for them. He prays that His Father would guard them in the name that would be placed upon them in Holy Baptism. The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

It's a beautiful thing to know that Jesus is praying for His Father to be watching over us and to be keeping us strong in Christian faith. I am reminded of the thousands of times in the past 39 plus years that I have dismissed a table of communicants with the words, And now may the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you strong in faith until life everlasting. Depart in peace. Does life here on earth get any better than to be in fellowship with the angels and the archangels and with all the company of heaven, to be in communion with our parents and our grandparents and with saints who have gone on before us at our Lord's Table. Or to say it another way, to have resurrection unity, by virtue of our baptism into the family of God, as brothers and sisters in the faith.

Four brief meditations, in closing today, on the subject of Resurrection Unity. These meditations are based on one of my favorite catechism questions, "Why is Christ's resurrection so important and comforting?" Four answers are given.

Answer #1 is that Christ's resurrection proves that Christ is Who He said He was, the Son of God. The kingdom of God is like a medium sized congregation in a medium sized town full of folks who are scattered and they are perplexed, but they are not crushed, and they are not divided. For in these days of the Virus and all of the damage it is doing, they believe with all of their hearts that Christ is risen. And not only is He risen, He has ascended and He has been crowned, and He is sitting at the right hand of His FATHER. And not only has He ascended and been crowned and is sitting at the right hand of His Father, He is ruling all of heaven and earth with authority, and not only is He ruling all of heaven and earth with authority, but He has promised to work everything out for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purposes.

Answer #2 is that Christ's resurrection proves that His teachings are true. The kingdom of God is like a young lady who is confirming her Baptism faith this very day here at St. Paul Lutheran Church. She has been catechized by this congregations's mentors and her pastors, but mainly by her grandma. Today she will profess her faith in the Triune God, she will be promising to do spiritual battle with the forces of darkness, she will promise to be diligent in the means of God's grace. As she communes for the very first time, she will be receiving a foretaste of the great heavenly banquet that is to come. She may not understand it or feel this way, but life doesn't really get any better than this!

Answer #3 is that Christ's resurrection proves that God the Father accepted Christ's sacrifice as full and complete payment for our sins. The kingdom of God is like a couple in their sixties breathing a sigh of relief and quietly celebrating after sending in their final

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mortgage payment. It's like a husband rejoicing and appreciating his wife more than ever before after she looks him in the eye and speaks softly, "I forgive you. You can quit apologizing now." It's like a small group of Lutherans gathered for Holy Communion. They keep their distance even as their Lord draws near. Their faces are masked, even as the Lord makes his face shine on theirs. Their souls are clean, even as they head over for the hand sanitizing station.

Answer #4 is that Christ's resurrection proves that there will be a resurrection of our bodies into eternal life. The kingdom of God is like a widow who misses her husband every day, some days with tears, and other days with busy-ness, but even as she walks through the shadow of the valley of death, she is not afraid. It's like a family who is waiting for the 4th of July before they can attend the funeral of their loved one. Their views on politics and religion are as diverse as they can be, and yet they are bound together by this simple belief that in Christ there is forgiveness of sins, there is a resurrection of the body, and there is eternal life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.