

Easter 7
John 17:11b-19

5/13/18
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SERMON TEXT IS OUR GOSPEL LESSON FROM THE 17TH CHAPTER OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

Today is Mother's Day, the day our nation sets aside to remember mom. Our mothers just had that way of driving away our fears, didn't they? When we were afraid of the storm or the monster under our mom, mom just knew what to say, just what to do, to make our fears go away.

Wouldn't it be nice if mom could do that still today? I say that because as we get older, our fears get much more real – health, and finances, and our own children and grandchildren. This past Thursday, forty days of His Easter resurrection, Christ Jesus ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us there. That means our home is in heaven and we are strangers here. And yet, in the darkness this valley of the shadow of death, it is easy to become frightened. And so, Jesus prays for us,

Holy Father, keep them in your name ... the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Our Gospel lesson this morning is from what we call the High Priestly prayer. In the upper room, Jesus, as our intercessor with the Father, prays -- and He prays these words aloud, so the disciples would hear and know He was praying for them. It would not be long and He would leave the upper room to go to Gethsemane, be arrested and tried, beaten and whipped, and crucified.

Jesus' words are difficult for us to come to grips with, to wrap our minds around because we don't feel hated, in a sense, especially living in

Mercer County, ND. We do not worship under the cover of darkness for fear of being shot; we are not fed to lions for confessing Christ. We may not always feel hated; yet, we are in the world, and we are not supposed to be of the world. Yet, there is a little more world in us than we care to admit. Our fear today is that we will not be popular with the world. We crave the praise of our peers, while knowing that we should seek to please God.

Have you backed down or even been embarrassed when called to account for being a member of “that” church? You know the one that so-and-so came to and could not take Communion, or does not believe in women pastors, or is so antiquated to believe marriage is still between a man and a woman? Have you believed our horoscope more readily than God’s Word? Have you dishonored those in authority over you, even that boss at work you can’t stand? Have you hurt anyone, especially with your words? Have you thought your life would be so perfect if only you were married to her/him? Have you taken what is not yours? Have you expressed your contentment or grumbled, letting everyone know how bad you’ve got it?

These are the choices we make every day. And, they show that maybe we don’t feel hated because we make ourselves more at home in the world than we care to admit. We need to examine our lives in light of the words of St. James, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4).”

Jesus knew this world and understood this world in which we would live after His ascension into heaven. He, as our King, rules this world – and that we journey through much tribulation in this world He governs. Jesus knew the world in which His Apostles remained as He ascended to

heaven, the world He would govern for their journey through much tribulation to their eternal good. The devil is a roaring lion. The flesh is selfish and insatiable in its desire for things that moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal and popularity with a world that is quickly coming to an end.

This Sunday marks a unique time in the life of the Lord's Church. Our Lord has ascended into heaven; the promised Comforter has not come. But, there is Good News for us who wrestle with fear every day: Jesus has not left us helpless nor hopeless.

"Holy Father, keep them in Your name," Jesus prays. There is nothing that we have faced or could face, that Jesus has not faced and won the victory over. The book of Hebrews says it this way, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (He 4)."

God hears His Son's prayer for you. And, He answers that prayer. God protects you. God keeps you in the protection of His own Son, Jesus.

By His death, He crushed the head of the father of all lies to silence his accusations forever. By His resurrection, He has swallowed up death forever. "In the world you will have tribulation," Jesus says. "But take heart; I have overcome the world (Jn 16:33)."

Now, He has ascended to the right hand of the Father. "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am (Jn 14)." At His ascension, Jesus ascended to prepare a place in heaven for you. Your home is in heaven. You are a stranger here.

We live in this world, but we are not of the world, anymore than Jesus was of the world. We find ourselves as strangers here, living in a world that hates us as it hated Jesus. But the great comfort and cheer we have is that we are kept, we are sanctified in the truth of God's Word. Through the Word, Christ's victory over the world and the evil one is made your very own victory.

Think of it this way: The book of Genesis tells us, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth," so He decided to blot man from the face of the earth. But, Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. So, God tells Noah to make an ark and enter that ark. The Lord shut Noah in that ark and it saved him from the flood waters.

In the new birth of our baptism, God shuts us up into Christ, making us one with Christ in death and life. Christ's death is our death and His Easter resurrection is our resurrection from the death of sin and the grave. Living and moving and having our being in Christ, we are saved from sin, death, and the devil, from the lies of the devil and the temptations of today, just as Noah was saved from the flood.

When Joseph's brothers meant evil for him, God kept him and worked good for all of them. When the devil tried to destroy Job, even in the midst of sorrow, toil, and woe, God kept him. When Peter denied Jesus, Jesus restored him and kept him, even through a martyr's death. When Paul was a blasphemer and murderer, God's grace made him the apostle to the Gentiles and kept Paul.

Do not fear! This world is not your home. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In his Small Catechism, Luther teaches us,

“God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.”