

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In our gospel this morning, we have the last petition of the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus' farewell discourse as he starts the last leg of his journey to Calvary. He is praying for his disciples then, and his disciples now, and all those who will come to discipleship. Jesus prayed often in his earthly ministry to invoke the power of God and to discern the will of God.

Jesus is facing that agonizing, horrible death on the cross and here he is, praying for others. Think of it, Judas has betrayed him and will soon sign his death warrant with a kiss, Peter's going to deny him in short order, James and John and the rest will desert him, leaving him alone when he needs them the most. And yet here he is, praying for those who fail him, as well as praying for those who will come over the next score or more of centuries.

Often our prayer is "first person" for I, me, my. Yet our gospel challenges us to pray for others, to lose ourselves in their joys, their hurts, their grief and failings. Love your neighbor as yourself, and it's when we pray for others that we often find our purpose, our true identity as disciples of Jesus.

Before when, before where, God came out of nowhere and created something out of nothing, as I paraphrase the Apostle Paul in Ephesians, he chose us before the creation of the world to praise his glorious grace. Reread our gospel vv. 21-22. "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that world may believe that you have sent me."

Brothers and sisters, Christ's resurrection gives us a unity of purpose, and we have heard on the eve of the resurrection Jesus saying "Peace I give to you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." We are sent, commissioned to go and tell in word and deed, in our lives, that Christ has risen, he is alive!

It is you and I God uses to share the Good News with an alienated world, and in real evangelism, not just using the title, we are to point, lead, help, empower people to what God is doing in the world because we have a real function as living witnesses to the power of God, to the kingdom of God, extending and clasping the hand of true fellowship.

Jesus prays for unity of purpose, that the world, the unchurched, the alienated, might see the love of God as you and I have experienced it in him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that all who believe in him may have eternal life." Unity of purpose in the presence of the Son, our Lord, because unless we are empowered by him, we fail. If they know we are Christians by our love, then we must show our love, for each other, for our neighbors, and in so doing, for our God. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Jesus gave his life that we might live in harmony, in peace, with God, with ourselves, with each other. Jesus reminds us that the servant is not greater than his master and he tells us to love each other even as he has loved us.

Unity of purpose, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, brings us into the place where Jesus is present with the Father. Where we gather in his name, with Jesus' purpose in mind, praising his name, praising God, he is present. We don't march in uniformity, we are not uniform one with the other, but we do live in unity, in union.

Our views on the liturgy, on the hymns we sing, on various other aspects of life together, may all differ, but our purpose is to be in unity, united by Christ present in and through the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. We are the church, and the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord, a new creation by water and the word, bought by Christ's own blood, and for her life he died.

Jesus prays that we might have union with God, with the Holy Trinity, in one mystic communion. Christ is risen! And we are saved by grace through faith, God's grace, that we like saints before us, may see him face to face.

AMEN