

John 17:6-19 (Easter 7B)  
May 13, 2018

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

It wasn't that long ago I was 18 and preparing to graduate (high school). OK, it might have been a few years ago before any of our graduates today were born but my memory isn't so bad I don't remember it. Here I stood – at the top of the world. The day I thought would never come was finally here. I would soon be free and out on my own. Finally, I could make my own choices and prove to my parent's that I was always right.

Indeed, graduation from high school is one of life's special moments; a huge accomplishment that has taken many years of dedication and hard-work. And if you are like I was you may encounter thoughts you can do it all on your own. Independence is finally yours. So off to college I went with no curfews, no mom coming in at 7 yelling, "Chad, it's time to get up" or waiting for me at the door when I came home at 11:30 p.m. to interrogate me about where I had been, who I was with, what I was doing, etc. And perhaps the best part of all was that no longer did I have to get up on Sunday morning and head out the door for the 8:00 church service. Now, this was the life! I had it all or at least it seemed.

Yet, it was a bit scary and I soon realized I couldn't do it all on my own. After all, how was I supposed to know what to do when the car broke down or how to pay for all those books or that I had to pay back those credit card companies with something called interest and late-fees? I guess I didn't know everything and yes - still needed my parents for a few things.

And in time I came to realize all those new adventures waiting beyond high school, all those opportunities that seemed so much more important than church, and all those things that seemed to promise happiness and prosperity ultimately fade away. After years of enjoying the freedom, the college life, the late nights, skipping one or two classes – it became apparent to me that life is not always easy and in fact it's pretty dawg-gone frightening at times. Being out there in a big world with all sorts of choices, temptations, and often not-so-nice people can get a little intimidating. In fact, a great big world can get often lonely at times.

Jesus knew that as well. He was well aware of the treacherous encounters the disciples would incur after His death, resurrection, and ascension to His Father. He knew all too well the fears they would face, the pain they would suffer, the loneliness they would endure, and the temptations they would come up against in their mission to tell the world about the good news of God's love revealed in the Son. Jesus knew many would not believe a story that seemed

impossible. He knew that around every corner, every closed door encountered, that the young church would face forces opposed to God's will and counter-cultural to the life He had lived and revealed to His disciples. He knew this because He lived it.

In our text this morning, we find Jesus, prior to his ensuing death the next day, praying. Not for the anguish he will endure, the fear he may encounter, or for an escape from the cross. No, we find Him praying for the disciples God has given Him. Just prior to His darkest hour He seeks not His own interests but rather those for whom He has been sent to love. He calls on God to protect them and make them one just as Father and Son are one. He prays the joy he has in His heart may be made complete in their hearts. And he prays that they may be made holy – that is sanctified – set apart to bear forth his presence, love, and light to the world. Jesus will live in and continue to be glorified by his disciples; even after he ascends to be with his heavenly parent in heaven. But it is not just the disciple's Jesus prays for, but verse 20 states, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." In this final prayer Jesus is praying for the entire church to come, for all those who believe in Him, and He continues to pray to this day that we may be protected

from the evil one, be filled with joy, be united together through and in Him, and be consecrated as God's holy people.

In time I came to realize I needed church. I couldn't fill up my happiness meter, my joy thermometer, my love gauge, my safety net with those opportunities waiting for me beyond the high school doors. The friends would fade away. The good times would come and go like a passing train in the night. Something was still missing. College had not prepared me for everything. I still had questions and needed guidance. And there somewhere in the midst of it all the Holy Spirit was still at work bringing home another lost sheep.

We are never alone! Jesus will never give up on us. Day after day, through the grace of God, his Spirit resides in us purifying us and using us to glorify Him and shine forth the light of his love he has lavishly poured out upon us.