

May 29, 2022  
John 17:20-26

Like last week, there is not a formal transcript of this week's sermon.

Joy J. Moore (Luther Seminary) tells the story of a mother and her young son. She had homeschooled her children. This young boy was now at the age of middle school and had decided he wished to attend public school with his friends. It was the night before his first day. Literally, his first day in a public school setting. Now, I don't remember my very first day of school, but I do remember my first day of junior high, high school, college and seminary. The nerves, uncertainties, fears, etc. I can only imagine this is what that boy was experiencing. As was mom's custom, she tucked her son into bed and they said a nighttime prayer together. But the boy said, "No, mom will you say the other prayer with me." Mom was a bit taken aback and said we just prayed. Mom had another custom or spiritual discipline. After her children were sound asleep she would quietly come in and say a prayer for each one. Lift them up to God. Pray over them. It seems each child knew this and this is what that son yearned for that night. Maybe they had awoken at times and heard bits and pieces of that prayer. Other nights, I am sure they stayed sound asleep but knew mom was there. Knew she was praying over them. It seems this prayer is just what that son needed on that night. The power of mom's prayer might have assured him of her great love for him. Jesus' love for him. That he wouldn't be alone tomorrow. It gave him strength, comfort, and peace. Never doubt the ability of the Holy Spirit to be at work in our prayers. In some way, on that night, as mom prayed he was eavesdropping on this prayer.

Moore indicates that is what the disciples are doing. Eavesdropping on Jesus' prayer. His intimate communication with God. They are invited to be flies on the wall, so to speak. Recall the context, this is Maundy Thursday, the night before his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus has shared a final meal with his disciples. He's washed their feet. He's loved them to the very end and he's commanded them to love one another just as he has loved them. This is how the world will know you are my disciples.

One can only imagine what's going through Jesus' mind. One can only imagine what's going through the disciples mind. Maybe a bit like that young man. Afraid. Anxious. Uncertain. Maybe even grieving that Jesus will be leaving. What does Jesus do? He prays. He invites them to listen in.

In the other gospels we hear Jesus prayed in the Garden. But we also hear the disciples were asleep. Not so in John. This prayer might be a microcosm of John's theology. His Christology. Of who Jesus is. Who God is. Jesus was always with God. He is God. Jesus has shown, told and revealed in every way possible that He and the Father are one. They abide in one another. He communicates with God through prayer. This is what Jesus desires of his disciples and for his church to come. Abide in him. Rest in the love he and the Father have. Rest in the love of God for the world. We will come and make our home in you.

On that final night, Jesus continues to love to the end. Immediately before our passage, he prays for those first disciples gathered with him. One can only imagine in the days to come. In the time following his death and then their encounter with the risen Christ. In the time after his ascension and before the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, this prayer brought them comfort. They recalled it. It gave them strength. It's the power of Jesus' word.

But did you hear who else Jesus prayed for? The church. Those believers who come to faith through the word they shared about him. The message they proclaimed. The good news. The love they shared that revealed to the world they were his disciples. He prayed for them. He prayed for all future believers. He prayed for his church. He prayed for the churches the Apostle Paul would soon establish in cities such as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, etc. He prayed for the churches that would be established across the globe. He prayed for a young church established in 1895 by a group of Danish immigrants abiding in the love of God: Father, Son and Spirit. He prayed for the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church that would be renamed to Bethany Lutheran Church in the 1940's. He would continue to pray for his church. Pray for us gathered today. Pray for all people. He loves his church. He loves his people. He loves the world. He prays for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and he will pray for their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

He prays for all the churches of West Branch. The people of West Branch Friends Church, St. Bernadette's, West Branch United Methodist Church, West Branch Friends Conservative Meeting, Springdale United Methodist, Downey Baptist.

This prayer is sheer gift. Grace. Love. He prays for you. Today. Tomorrow. Each and every day!