

Preached by Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
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John 5: 9-13
John 17: 6-19

CHRIST'S SONETTO

When we hear Jesus pray, we truly grasp what he was trying to convey time and again to his disciples. But to hear him we have to look at what he was saying. Not only as a petition, a request, but also as an affirmation—an affirmation so strong it takes on the lyrical character of a sonnet. We have learned one of Christ's prayers that has that lyrical nature. And we have named that prayer *The Lord's Prayer*. Not the prayer we read today, but the prayer we say often without hearing the words of Jesus—the prayer that has become second nature to us.

The prayer we call *The Lord's Prayer* is, in reality, a disciple's prayer—a lesson taught by Jesus to the disciples on how to be his disciple. Here we hear the Lord in prayer. This is just before his crucifixion, and he prays to his followers.

When parents bring their children to the church and request baptism, one question we always ask is "Will you promise to pray with your child as well as pray for your child? Will you teach him to pray by practicing prayer with him?" Praying with—the teaching aspect of disciple-making.

And there are lessons that we learn when we stop long enough to hear Jesus in those prayers. When Jesus prayed with his child-like disciples, he, in essence, says, you cannot pray this prayer and say "I" even once. You cannot pray this prayer and say "my" even once. When you pray this prayer I am teaching you, you have to always pray for one another. When you pray the disciple prayer, you must include sister and brother. Others are included in each of the pleas within *The Lord's Prayer* (the disciple's prayer). So look closely from beginning to end. It does not have "me" as a pronoun anywhere in it.

Disciples experiencing and applying the lessons of Jesus' ministry always have to do so in relationship, certainly with God, but also with one another.

We look at *The Lord's Prayer* in the way that he taught his disciples to experience his transforming power; we recognize again that Jesus is always to be the center and the focus of every connection we have.

Remember the comic routine where there's a dark stage and a single circle of light in the middle of the stage. The comic comes out and frantically looks everywhere within that light but all around there is darkness. Pretty soon a policeman comes out and asks him what he's doing. The comic says, "I'm looking for my keys." The policeman says, "Did you drop them here close by?" Are they somewhere in this circle of light?" And the

comic says, “No, I dropped them over in the corner where it’s dark.” And the policeman asks, “So why aren’t you looking there?” And the response, “ There is no light in the corner.”

How many of us have dark areas within our lives—areas of darkness made up of unforgiveness? Of grudges—of hurts—of breaches of trust? How many of us come, and we look at one another within this wonderful church family and we know that the light is here, but there is a dark shadow in our hearts over in the corner?

Jesus is praying for his disciples. Lord, protect them. Father, I am coming to you, but my disciples will remain in the world. Doesn’t he sound like a worried parent to you—a parent who is maybe sending their child away to school for the first time? A parent who knows the world can be a scary, threatening place. And what does he mean we are to be in the world but not of the world, and somehow still make connections to the world. Pretty clear he doesn’t call us to become the new Amish, does he? Not to retreat and become our own little world, denying that the rest of the world is out there.

But he does, in fact, call us to redefine the priorities of being one in him. Jesus is praying, “Holy Father, let them learn how faith in You is always very personal; but, it is not private.”

We are not called to fit in the world. Just as we’re not called to pull away and reject and deny that we live in a simple, physical reality. We’re also not called to embrace everything that culture—our world—offers us. But I am afraid often that is our legacy.

Some have said that the church acts like a golden retriever. The world or culture throws a bone somewhere and we run after it and grab it. We may even sink our teeth into it a little bit, but we do little more than fetch and receive whatever fad the world is proclaiming is important. So if you ever owned a retriever you know that they can be quite provoking; but you also know that if you left them at home alone to guard the house, in all likelihood if a burglar came, they would do little more than hold the flashlight while the burglar took everything in your home.

Is that what the church does? Are we holding the flashlight while culture steals our true identity? Jesus is praying for protection for the church for a reason. He knows that we are not naturally inclined to be unified. He knows that will be the first way in which we are threatened. We will lose our unity—our mutually supportive prayer time for one another. The world—our culture—has one defining aim, especially when it comes to the church: To separate us and isolate us from the Holy Father, who is in heaven; to whom Jesus prayed .

It may not seem as if we are in battle with culture, for all too often the tempter makes it seem like just the right thing to do is to go along. All that has to happen for us to fall down that slippery slope is to be robbed by the evil one telling us that the joy we have experienced with Christ isn’t real. All that the tempter has to do to put us at odds with

one another is steal our joy and constantly remind us of that which separates us rather than that which binds us as one.

Back in chapter 14 when Jesus began this section of John, he emphasized how important it was to joyously celebrate being together. So my answer to you today—both the answer from the Epistle and the Gospel lesson—is that if we want to maintain a strong witness to the Lordship of Christ, we will have to learn to sing the sonnet of our unity born from enjoying one another.

Think about it. The only difference in the conversations we have with those we consider to be our enemies and the conversations of those we consider to be our friends is that we love our friends. The words can be the same, but with those we love comes joy in the simplest of tasks. Maybe all that's missing when you find yourself in a strange relationship, is that you've allowed the tempter to rob you of joy that is so essential to following Jesus.

Holy Father, protect them. Make them one in me. Even as I am one in You.
Amen.