

May 28, 2017
Easter 7
Jesus Prays for the Disciples
Acts 1:6-14 (Ascension); Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 (Ascension Images)
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11 (Jesus' Priestly Prayer)
The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham
Christ the King Lutheran Church

Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Gracia y paz de Dios, Padre, Hijo e Espiritu Santo
Grace and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jana Riess writes a regular blog for the website Religion News. She had this to say about the passing of Maya Angelou three years ago.

“Over the last 24 hours I’ve seen several people refer to Angelou as the “caged bird” of her writings. She is now free, they suggest, free of the mortal body that caged her, that cages us all. Death has released her, and now she is in heaven. Ms. Riess goes on to offer a different perspective:

“Angelou is not in heaven “now.” Her writings show a joyful person who was never not in heaven. An ongoing theme of her remarkable work has always been its full-on, all-in commitment to living life in the kingdom. That’s God’s kingdom in the here and now. Angelou wasn’t waiting for some pie-in-the-sky release to an ethereal realm.

Finally, Ms Riess challenges our notion of eternal life:

“The contemporary heresy that sees the human body as an obstacle to be overcome, as something that will no longer burden us in the afterlife, is a heresy. It is not a Christian idea.”

Today’s Gospel challenges our notion of eternal life and our calling to live in the kingdom of God, right now.

Jesus and the disciples are finishing a meal together. There are likely more people gathered than just “the twelve”. Jesus has made a whole lot of promises to these disciples, Jesus promised an Advocate who will comfort and sustain them after he has gone back to the Father in heaven. He assures them that they will not be alone.

Jesus then turns his attention away from the disciples, looks up to heaven and prays. He prays FOR the disciples, IN their presence. And we get to listen in on this prayer.

Listen as Jesus prays for the disciples . . . for YOU, really. Let the words of Jesus wash over you.

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.” Jesus is praying for YOU and ME, not just the disciples at that dinner table. “And this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ! Eternal life is NOT the “hereafter! Eternal life is knowing God in our lives, NOW!

Listen as Jesus tells the Father more about you: “Father, I have made your name known to those whom you gave me. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. The words that you gave to me I have given to them, they have received them and know in truth that I came from you. They have believed that you sent me.” Jesus Christ, intimately connected to God, the Father and Creator, prays for US to be equally intimately connected with God the Father!

This is what Jesus work is all about! To make God known to the world and to reconcile the world to God, the Creator.

Do we need further proof that Jesus is praying for us? OK, here it comes . . . Jesus says to the Father in Heaven: "I ask not only on behalf of these (the disciples at the table) But also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word"

This great priestly prayer that Jesus offers to God is on OUR behalf. That we would be unified with God, with Jesus Christ and with one another. We quarrel, stomp and fume, we gossip and tear one another down We huff with indignation over petty misunderstandings. We stand by and shake our heads at the heinous atrocities committed against our neighbors. In spite of our shortcomings, our sin and our exclusivity, we are created for relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

It is our calling to live in unity in the kingdom of God, with all of our neighbors, black, Muslim, LGBTQ, Hispanic, documented, undocumented, right here, right now! We don't get to choose. Jesus prays that all who know Jesus, including us, will be witnesses to Jesus, in the world so that the world may believe that Jesus is Lord of ALL creation.

Today's gospel, indeed every gospel text, is more than a story written about something that happened 2000 years ago. This text is for US! NOW! We have access to the kingdom of heaven because of this prayer! After Jesus had left the disciples and ascended into heaven, the disciples once again gathered in a quiet room to wait for the Holy Spirit. While waiting, they "were constantly devoted to prayer".

Have you experienced someone praying FOR you . . . out loud . . . while you listen?

Let's try something

Turn to the person next to you. Pray this simple prayer

"Dear God, thank you for _____. Bless her/him today."

This may have felt awkward, but remember that prayer has the power to change us. Maya Angelou says this about prayer:

"I know that when I pray, something wonderful happens. Not just to the person or persons for whom I'm praying, but also something wonderful happens to me. I'm grateful that I'm heard."

Jesus knows that God listens to prayer! Jesus trusts God to fulfill all the promises made from the beginning of creation.

We can trust God to fulfill the promises made to us in our baptism and in the bread and wine on this table. We live in the fullness of God's promise when we dip our hand into the baptismal waters to make the sign of the cross on our foreheads. We live the fullness of God's promise when we come to this table where we taste and see the living body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of heaven is here, in our midst.

The Kingdom of heaven is in the grocery store, at the gas station.

The Kingdom of heaven is Manchester, England; Egypt and the NE Portland MAX stop.

The Kingdom of heaven is joy, sorrow, fear and release.

Jesus prays for the Kingdom in all its glorious messiness and confusion. And the messiness and confusion are forgiven and transformed by God's grace and mercy.

Thanks be to God!