

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, September 26, 2010

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Hymns: 367, 352 :1, 220, 348, 410.

Lessons: Isaiah 55: 1-13, 1 Peter 4: 12-17 and 5: 6-11, Luke 9: 51-56.

Sermon Text: John 17:1-11

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus is now in heaven, as we confess in the creed, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. But before he ascended into heaven, he prayed for his disciples. In this prayer, Jesus says ***"I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you."*** Please listen today as we hear that

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

- 1. God glorified Jesus and gave him all power.**
- 2. God guides all believers.**
- 3. God protects all believers.**

This entire chapter – John 17 – is what has been called Jesus' high priestly prayer because with these words he performed part of his function as high priest and intercedes with the Father for his disciples on earth. (Another part of his high priestly work is his offering the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all mankind – himself – on the altar of the cross.) He prays for himself, then for the disciples and for all believers. Immediately after this prayer, he heads for the Garden of Gethsemane, where the sufferings leading up to his death would begin in earnest and he would be betrayed.

Jesus suffered horribly, was horribly persecuted and put to death. He did this even though he had authority and power and jurisdiction and strength over all things, people, and creatures.

But how did he use that power and authority? He didn't just use it to perform miracles to wow people with his power. He used it to ***"give eternal life to all those [his heavenly Father had] given him."*** Every miracle he performed while on earth fits into what John wrote near the end of his Gospel: ***"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*** John 20:30-31

Jesus made plain to his disciples before he ascended into heaven that he had all authority and power: ***"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*** Matthew 28:18.

With Jesus' authority and power over Satan, the devil, he rose from the dead when Satan thought he had won the victory. With Jesus' authority over every human being, he won and earned eternal life for everyone. However, it would have value only for those who would use it, that is, only for the believers. Jesus offers eternal life to all, but he gives eternal life only to all who believe, to all those whom his Father gave him. Those are the believers. His heavenly Father had entrusted believers into Jesus' care.

So do we need to talk about what eternal life is? People on earth are so very concerned about living long and happy lives. So many want only happiness and pleasure in this life, and can't wait to get it. Some work

hard for decades to save up and plan for a retirement in which they can do exactly what they want to do, and enjoy all the possessions they have built up. But it isn't always that way. This life is a place of tears and sorrow. Scripture tells us in Acts 14:22: **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."** And we never know when this life on earth will end.

Eternal life is a place and a time – if we can think of eternity as a “time” – where, as we read in Revelation 7:17: **"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** God repeats that again in Revelation 21:4 **"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** Jesus tells us what is involved in eternal life, and how we get it: **"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."**

Jesus wasn't just concerned about praising himself in other ways than performing miracles while he was on earth. He wanted to praise and glorify his heavenly Father. He says in this prayer to his heavenly Father: **"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."**

"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Through his resurrection and ascension into heaven Jesus was glorified. Jesus had that glory with the Father in heaven, and now, he still has it, this time in heaven both as true God and True Man, foreshadowing that all who believe in him will share that glory in heaven.

Jesus continues in his prayer to his Father: **"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."** How is it that believers “obey God's Word”? Surely we don't live perfect lives in perfect obedience to all God's laws. Surely we don't live a life of perfection in order to earn our own way into heaven. But we trust, we believe that Jesus lived that perfect life, AND that he was punished because we didn't and can't live a perfect life. It is because of Jesus' life of perfection that we have the gift of eternal life. Any obedience to God's Words comes as fruits of faith. Just as an apple tree doesn't produce fruits of rotten bananas, God's children seek in all they do to obey God's Word and bring forth God-pleasing fruit. That's one reason we learn and have our children memorize the ten commandments of God. That summarizes the will of God.

God's commands have three uses: They show us our sinfulness like a mirror shows us exactly what we look like and are. They prevent, to some degree, the gross outbreaks of sin in the world, like the curb in front of your house prevents, to some degree, the garbage that the rain washes into the street from coming into your yard. Another picture of a curb is the 4 or 5 foot high concrete barriers between opposing lanes on a freeway. They prevent, to some degree, cars from crashing into each other head-on. Then there is the use we emphasize today in talking about fruits of faith: the law of God as a guide, or a guideline. It serves as a pattern and guide for our good works. Good works can properly be defined as everything a believing child of God does in the fear and love of God.

Jesus' followers not only obey his Word. He continues: **"Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me."** Jesus had told them everything they need to know. But knowing our human frailty that we don't always remember, we must hear again the words of Peter: **"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!"** 2 Peter 3:17-18.

Jesus is praying for his disciples in this prayer. **"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am**

coming to you.” Jesus is praying in these words for us, for believers, and is not at this time praying for the world, but for those God gave him, the believers. These are the ones the Father has given to the Son. They belong to the Son and to the Father through faith. And the disciples in faith had glorified Jesus and praised his name. Now Jesus was going to leave the world and go to the Father, but the disciples had to remain in the world. So Jesus prayed for them, placing them in the Father’s care. Jesus showed us the Father. Jesus reveals the true God to mankind. Believers know that everything Jesus was given comes from God the Father. Jesus gave us the Words of the Father. Those words worked faith.

Jesus and the Father have all things in common. What one has, the other has. Omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, omnipresence, power, authority, divinity, for the Father and the Son are both God, as is also the Holy Spirit.

Did you notice that Jesus said **“glory has come to me through them”**? We glorify God through our God-pleasing actions and lives and words and thoughts.

As Jesus says **“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you,”** he leaves a special request for all believers on earth: **“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.”**

Protect them, he prays. What is our umbrella of protection? Is it insurance policies that will pay large sums of money to our survivors or that will pay our bills? Is it our retirement accounts, which recently haven’t been growing as fast as many would like them to grow, or perhaps have even declined in value? In the economies of the world lately, we have seen that earthly possessions and savings are nothing to rely upon for a secure future. Is our protection found in our possessions, which can be stolen, or destroyed by fire, tornado, or other acts of God?

Jesus says **“protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one,”** Our protection is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost – the way we begin our public worship services. Our protection is in the power of God’s name, the way we close our worship services with a benediction. At the end of our public worship service you will hear the words **“The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”** Numbers 6:24-26. Those words which bracket our worship services remind us, if we think about it, that God is protecting us by the power of his name.

God’s name is the name of salvation, as we read when Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to the Rulers and elders of the people: **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Acts 4:12

God will protect us eternally. If we are to be taken from this world, God will take us to heaven. If we are to remain in this world to suffer, God will provide protection and help and comfort. For we are told by the psalmist in Psalm 91:9-11: **“If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;”** Paul tells us in Romans 8:28: **“we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

God’s angels guard you! God’s angels and his Word protect you! God will make all things work for good to those who have been called according to his purpose! May we rely on God for our protection! The evil one, the devil, and the world, and our flesh are constantly attacking us. But remember that Jesus overcame them and that on the last day the devil will be consigned to hell eternally, with all the unbelieving world. Until that day, protect us, O Lord, and take us to heaven! Amen.