

An Answer to Prayer

May 8, 2016

John 17:20-26

I gulped and handed our oldest son the car keys. I watched him begin his first solo trip as a licensed driver. And I began to pray.

This is one of those parenting “moments of truth.” We worked for years to produce a capable and strong young adult. We prepared for precisely this moment. Now, in raw panic, we wished we could take it all back. And we began to pray.

Now you have a small insight into today’s gospel reading.

Soon Jesus will be executed on a cross. Then he will be raised as Lord of all. Jesus has spent three years preparing his disciples for this precise moment. Soon he will hand them the keys to the kingdom of God. He looks over this motley crew of fisherman and revolutionaries and tax collectors and traitors. And Jesus begins to pray.

Believe or not, these disciples are the answer to his prayer.

But, as they say in the infomercials, there’s more! “*I ask not only on behalf of these [disciples],”* Jesus prays, “*but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their words...*” Those who will know Jesus through the witness of the apostles...dear friends, that’s US.

You are an answer to Jesus’ prayer.

That’s the main thought for today. We need to spend a few moments just taking that in. I doubt if that thought has ever occurred to you before this moment.

You are an answer to Jesus’ prayer.

Jesus prays for us. That’s the next startling thing about this gospel reading. Jesus prays for you and me.

Jesus prays for us to be one with him. That is what happens when we are baptized. As Riley is baptized today, Jesus’ prayer is answered yet again. In baptism we are fully and deeply united with Jesus. We are fully and deeply united with him in his death. We are fully and deeply united with him in his resurrection. And in that unity, we live a brand new life in him.

You are an answer to Jesus’ prayer.

That first driving experience for our son was nerve-wracking. I didn’t take another deep breath until I heard the front door open. At that moment, our prayers for his safety were answered. But deeper prayers were answered as well. He was becoming a mature and responsible young man.

His mother and I had worked and prayed for years to get to that point. He was and is a living answer to our prayers—all four of our children are.

Jesus prays for us. He prays that we will know our unity with God through him. He knows his disciples will face dangers. He is sending them out as full partners in his mission. That means trouble. That will land Paul and Silas in several Roman jails after several sound beatings. But even in prison, Jesus' prayer is powerful. Even there, the Good News is preached and people are set free.

You are an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Holy Baptism involves prayers and promises. Parents promise to train their children to be answers to Jesus' prayer. We promise to support parents in that great work. We all promise to walk with Riley as she grows in faith, hope and love.

We know that Riley Elizabeth Maxwell is an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Our kids could learn to drive on their own. Or someone else could teach them. That would have spared me several near death experiences on Nebraska roads. But I was privileged to be a parent at that moment. I wouldn't have missed it.

Our children might follow Jesus on their own. Maybe someone else will teach them. But we are all teachers of the faith. Parents are the primary teachers, and we support them in that ministry. We have the privilege to help our children be answers to Jesus' prayer.

You are an answer to Jesus' prayer.

And there is purpose to that prayer—*“that they may all be one.”* We are united with Jesus in baptism. And we are united with one another in that same baptism. We can't be one with Jesus and stay separate from his body.

Sin separates. Death divides. Evil estranges us from God, from one another and from Creation. Jesus dies and is raised to make it all whole again. The unity of Christians is a sign of that power. The unity of Christians shows the world that Christ is risen! The unity of Christians declares that the Holy Spirit is at work.

You can experience that unity by studying other faith traditions on Thursday mornings. You can experience that unity as we come together for ServeFest. You can experience that unity as we partner with Our Savior's Lutheran and St. Paul's Episcopal. You can experience that unity as we financially support the work of our Western Iowa Synod and the ELCA. In all those ways and more, we answer Jesus' prayer that we might be one.

Take this wonderful news with you today.

You are an answer to Jesus' prayer. Let's pray...

Pastor Lowell Hennigs
Emanuel Lutheran Church
Council Bluffs, Iowa