

I'M PRAYING FOR YOU
John 17:6-19

Messiah Confirmation Sunday
May 5, 2013
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

"I'm praying for you." What a wonderful and encouraging message this is. It is such a simple phrase and yet it communicates so much love, and concern. It is a phrase which also reminds us that there is a loving God who is all powerful and rules the world. It reminds us that there is a God who loves us and who is deeply concerned about each one of us; a God who definitely listens to and answers prayer.

I'm praying for you. Jesus was one who often prayed for others. In John's Gospel which was read a few minutes ago Jesus prayed this beautiful and stirring prayer for his disciples. "*Holy Father,*" he prayed, "*protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*"

And in verse 15 he prayed, "*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*" And in verse 17 he prays, "*Sanctify them* (which means help them grow) *by the truth; your word is truth.*"

Jesus knew very well that in a short time after his death, resurrection and ascension he would no longer be with his disciples in person. He also knew that life for most of them would not be easy. He knew they would face temptations to reject their faith and would face much persecution, and alienation, for their teaching and preaching.

So Jesus prays for his disciples. He prays to his father that the foundation of faith he has given them might remain strong. He also prays that they may be kept from the evil one, from Satan, that they would have strength to withstand temptation. And he prays that the disciples might be sanctified in truth—that they might grow and be strengthened each day in the truth of God's word found in the Bible.

Now I'm sure we can imagine that for the disciples simply knowing that Jesus prayed, and continued to pray for them, was certainly a source of much strength and encouragement in their ministry. We can imagine that as they thought about and remembered Jesus' prayer that it assured them they were not alone; it assured them that Jesus was still present with them, and that his Holy Spirit was there to fill them with life and love.

We can imagine that Jesus' prayer reminded the disciples when they were tempted to go astray that through Christ's victory over Satan and evil they, too, could resist. And we can imagine the times when they did give into temptation, when they did go astray, that this continual prayer of Jesus called them back to faith.

I'm praying for you. Jesus demonstrates in this prayer the power and importance of praying for others. As we live together in Jesus' Church, in his Body and community of faith, we can also attest to the importance and power of praying for each other.

I wish I could share with you every time in my pastoral ministry when I have had people share with me how they have felt and experienced the prayers and concerns of others. Whether they have been hospitalized or dealing with the death of a loved one or friend; or whether they have been going through a divorce or treatment for chemical dependency.

Whether they have been celebrating the joy of finding a new job, having a new baby or celebrating a wedding anniversary so many have shared with me how important the prayers of others have been. They have been so grateful for this expression of love and concern.

I know that in my own pastoral ministry that I would not be able to effectively preach, be a leader, give counsel or be there for people in time of need if there weren't people praying for me. I want to thank you today for your prayers for me and for your prayers for Charis as she is beginning her important ministry at Messiah. Please join us in praying that God will continue to do mighty and amazing things in and through our Messiah congregation.

Something else this prayer of Jesus should remind us of, especially on this Confirmation Sunday, is just how important it is for us to pray diligently for our youth, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and for all the young people in our congregation.

I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Christian young people with positive values do not become that way by accident. Rather it only happens when their faith is nurtured, influenced and encouraged by the loving prayers, witness and example of their parents and family, and by the support of a loving congregation and friends.

When I think of my own life so much of it has been shaped by the prayers of others. From the time I was a little boy I can remember our family devotion times when my parents prayed for me that I might follow Jesus.

Throughout my growing up years in the church I also remember special Sunday and Vacation Bible School teachers, along with special pastors, baptismal sponsors and friends who assured me of their prayers. And when I look back I know without a doubt that these prayers, as well as the people who prayed them, had a profound impact on my life.

There were times when knowing that people were praying for me assured me that I was not alone in my walk of faith. In the face of various temptations knowing that I was prayed for often gave me the strength to withstand. And yet the many times I did give into temptation, the many times I did try to go my own way, it was the prayers of family and friends that helped to call me back. And it was these prayers which also helped to assure me of God's love and forgiveness.

I'm praying for you. What a powerful witness this can be to our Confirmation young people today, as well as to every youth, child and adult. I'm praying just as Jesus did that you might

remain one with God. I'm praying that God might lead you in your decisions about friends, about college and about your life's work; and about whether or whom you will marry.

You know, my friends, Jesus did not just leave the disciple's future life to chance. He did not just hold his breath and hope that they would remain in their faith or that they would succeed in their ministry. No, Jesus diligently prayed with and for them everyday. He placed their lives and their future in the care and keeping of God their creator.

And in the case of our Confirmation class, as well as our children and youth, we cannot just sit back and simply hope all goes well. We can't simply rely on luck to see them through. Rather we need to follow Jesus' example and pray diligently with and for them.

We need to make sure they continue to worship and be involved here at Messiah; that they get involved with Charis and youth activities; that they stay connected with good Christian friends here at Messiah. And we need to encourage them by letting them know that they are in our prayers daily and that God's love and care is with them.

A young man in the military service was stationed in a foreign country. He was often pressured by his friends to join them in their destructive activities with drinking, women and carousing. And yet he always said, "No!" One day they asked him, "Why won't you join us?" "It is because," he said, "I carry with me a picture."

"What picture?" they asked, "One of your girlfriend?" "No," the young man said, "It is a picture of my last morning at home. Following breakfast, as was our custom, my mother took the Bible and began to read one of the Psalms. Then she began to pray but soon choked up with tears and could not finish."

"My father continued the prayer haltingly, with an occasional hesitation and tears, praying that I would remain close to Jesus Christ and not stray away from my faith. That is the picture I carry with me. I am still being prayed for and I cannot betray my Lord or my parents."

Jesus prayed, "*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.*" The assurance we have is that as Jesus prayed for his disciples he continues to pray this prayer for you and for me. He continues to pray that we might be nurtured in our faith; be kept from the evil one; and grow in our understanding of the truth.

May we allow this prayer of Jesus to encourage, uplift and guide us in our daily walk of faith. And may we, in turn, diligently pray with and for our Confirmands. May we encourage one another whatever our needs might be with these loved filled words, "I'm praying for you!"