

John 17:20-26
Easter 7C
June 2, 2019

“Divine Messengers”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How often do you pray for someone other than yourself? My guess is most of us pray for others before we pray for ourselves. Personally, I know that I pray for a lot of people ... often forgetting to pray for myself and my own needs. The good news for me ... and for you all ... is that's okay because we're assured in God's Word, handed down to us over the centuries, that someone is always praying for us.

The setting for the gospel today is the Last Supper ... more accurately, after the Last Supper. Jesus knows what's going to happen next. He knows He's going to be subjected to unimaginable pain and suffering. He knows His disciples are going to be torn apart by the world around them. So ... what does Jesus do? He prays. **(John 17:1)** *“Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven.”* First, He prays for Himself. So ... by the way, it's okay to pray for yourself. Then, He prays for the disciples who followed Him in faith throughout His three-year ministry. But He doesn't end there. Finally, He prays, **(John 17:20)** *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* Jesus, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Son of God, prays for us ... for you and me. Can you imagine that? In His darkest hour, Jesus is thinking of us ... *“those who will believe.”* He knows the difficulties we'll face in our lives. Following Him in faith is hard! So, He's praying for us! But ... what is He praying for?

He's praying for us ... that we might be one with Him ... just as He is one with His Father. He's praying that we would be consecrated. To “consecrate” means to “dedicate and set aside for a special purpose.” This ground at the intersection of Routes 2 and 4 was consecrated to build this church building. The building was consecrated to worship God through His Word and

Sacraments. Later in the service, I will consecrate bread and wine to become the Lord's Supper. We will also consecrate the offerings of God's people who are following Him in faith through their commitments to the *Following Him in Faith* Campaign.

In His prayer, Jesus consecrates us ... He sets us aside for a purpose, (John 17:21) *"That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

You remember that game "Telephone?" The game goes like this ... after sitting a bunch of people in a circle, I whisper a message in the ear of the first person. Then they whisper it into the next person's ear. Then they, in turn, whisper it into their neighbor's ear. The process continues until the whispered message makes its way around the circle. Then, the last person says what they heard. In a perfect situation, the last person would be able to repeat the message exactly as originally intended. Usually though, somewhere along the line, the message gets bungled and what comes out at the end isn't quite what the original message intended.

In a sense, God's Word is like "Telephone." Jesus, the Son of God, came down from heaven to tell His first disciples, called Apostles, His message. They were special people, consecrated by God to speak His message into others' ears so they could hear it, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, come to believe it. To be an Apostle, Luke tells us in Acts, one needed to be (Acts 1:21-22) *"One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us."* Joining the surviving 11 as Judas' replacement was Matthias. The "Divine Telephone" game was on.

From these 12 witnesses to all Jesus said and did, God's Word has been proclaimed from one ear into the next – starting in Jerusalem – throughout Judea and Samaria – to the end of the earth.

As we look at how God's Word has been transmitted from ear to ear over the ages, it might appear with all the divisions and arguments over doctrine and practices that man has bungled the divine message to a degree. That's why Jesus prays for us, **(John 17:20)** *"those who will believe in me through their word."* He prays we might be one with Him and His Father. He prays because He knows we struggle to be one with Him and His Father.

We've all heard His Word, passed down to us from the Apostles to disciples through the ages. But, as we hear His Word, we often don't live in accord with it. We live in, as Jesus says, **(John 17:25)** *"world that does not know (the Father)."* It doesn't know the Father because it doesn't know the truth of God's Word. So Satan, through this unknowing world, whispers into our ears and we fall victim to his temptations as God's Word is twisted into ways that please our ears. Or ... we fall victim to his temptations by deleting the parts of God's Word that don't sound good to our modern ears. In these ways, we mold God's Word into our own shapes ... and act accordingly. But even as God's Word tells us, **(Revelation 22:14)** *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates,"* His Word issues a clear warning, **(Revelation 22:15)** *"Outside are ... the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."* The world, including many claiming to be part of God's church, thinks they can edit God's Word for their own purpose. And trying to fit into a world which doesn't know the Father, we think we can rationalize our way into oneness with Jesus and His Father.

On the other hand, we also hear the truth of God's Word spoken into our ears and know what it says. Yet we can't bring ourselves to pass it along for some reason. Maybe it's a desire to go with the flow and not make waves in the world that doesn't know the Father. Maybe it's a

feeling that privacy is paramount ... your beliefs are your beliefs and my beliefs are my beliefs. It seems at times we desire “oneness” with the world more than “oneness” with God.

William Stringfellow, a noted 20th century Christian activist was leading a Sunday School class for 7th and 8th graders on Block Island, Rhode Island where he lived. At the end of their study of Acts, he asked the students whether or not there was any reason for their congregation to exist on Block Island. The students said, “No,” that since the people in the church acted like everyone else on Block Island, there didn’t seem to be any reason for having a separate institution, such as their church.

As William Willimon put it, *“Some of our churches, in leaning over so far to speak into the ears of the modern world, have fallen in.”*

Whatever the case ... the oneness God desires is elusive. And Jesus knows this. So He prays for us, (John 17:20-21) *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

Jesus’ prayer for us continued the next day, from the Cross. As He hung dying ... the sins of the world, including yours and mine, strapped to His back ... He prayed into the ears of His Father, (Luke 23:34) *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* And He died. But three days later, Jesus defeated the power of death to separate us from Him and His Father. Through His resurrection, He offers new life to all who believe in His Word and promises. He spoke His Word and His promises to His disciples who huddled for fear in the Upper Room saying, (John 20:21-23) *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.”*

The “Divine Telephone” call was begun. Jesus’ spoke His Words of forgiveness into His Apostles’ ears. They spoke His Words of forgiveness into the ears of Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria ... and the thousands upon thousands became one with Jesus and His Father ... becoming *“those who believe in me through their word.”* And today, because of Jesus’ prayer, we too have heard with our own ears and, by the Holy Spirit, come to believe in Him through their word.

But the “Divine Telephone Call” isn’t over yet. The call continues until the day Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. Jesus calls on us to speak His Word into the ears of the world. We are the next disciples in the line. He calls us to speak into the world’s ears by showing God to the world. John tells us, **(1 John 4:12)** *“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.”* Through our sacrificial, servant love for each other, and those around us, people will see God at work. In this way, by our words and actions, we boldly speak His Word in truth and love into the ears of the world which doesn’t know God, **(John 17:21)** *“so that the world may believe that You have sent me.”*

Jesus knows we’ll not always get it right. He knows we’ll sometimes bungle up His message. And when we do ... He forgives us. Then, by His Word and sacraments, through the Holy Spirit, He strengthens us for the hard work ahead. And so, we follow Him in faith, assured that Jesus’ prayer for us, **(John 17:24)** *“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory,”* will be answered. We’ll be “perfectly one” as we dwell with Him where He is and see His glory shining in eternity. **(Revelation 22:4-5)** *“(We) will see His face, and His name will be on (our) foreheads ... the Lord God will be (our) light, and (we) will reign forever and ever”* as kings living forever under the King of kings and Lord of lords.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.