

Get Out! *John 17:6-19*

Norwalk Christian Church, May 17, 2015, 7th Sunday of Easter, Year B

When each of our three children were born, Marti told them all, “We love you and you are welcome to live in our home for the next 18 years of your life, but after that, you have to get out!” I, of course, would never say anything like that.

On this end of parenthood, 18 years seems long enough! But, I imagine things are a little different on the other end of parenthood, as those 18 years come to a close and you prepare for that empty nest. As some of you are preparing to watch your child graduate in a few days...as some of you prepare for your little, baby child to begin their Senior year...and as some of you are preparing for your child to graduate from college...maybe 18 years is enough, and you’re ready to quote the title of this sermon to them, “Get Out!”

But I imagine you would do anything if you could experience again those 18 years!

The words of scripture we read this morning are good words for us this time of year, as we contemplate endings and new beginnings. Thank you (David/Gary) for reading our text this morning. It’s a tough one, easy to get tongue-tied with all the “words” and “worlds” and fluffy prayer language. It comes to us from the book of John, the strangest of the four Gospels, no doubt. I see the Gospel of John as a show-off valedictorian of the Gospel Class, who knows he’s smart and wants you to know it, too, through his verbosity and theological jargon.

Here’s what you need to know. This text is actually a prayer--Jesus’ prayer, or as some have called it, the “other Lord’s Prayer.”¹ The context is the upper room on Maundy Thursday, the night Jesus was betrayed, which we talk about every Sunday around the Communion Table. On that night, according to John, Jesus spent a good measure of time giving his disciples final words of wisdom. You can read it for yourself in John chapters 14-16. And then, here in chapter 17, Jesus turns to God and prays for his disciples, right there in their presence.

The prayer seems a bit long, as prayers often do, and it’s hard to follow everything Jesus says, so here’s the gist. *“Dear God, I’m about to leave, and my disciples cannot go with me. While I was with them, I protected them. Now, I’m leaving, so you need to protect them. Don’t take them out of the world--they’ve got work to do here. Leave them in the world, so they can finish my work, but, please, keep them safe. Oh, and God, I’m not just praying for them, but for everyone after them who follows me. May they all be one. In Jesus...I mean, in my name, Amen.”*

Surely you can relate to Jesus today? That moment, whenever it was, when you realized that you could no longer protect those who are in your care. Maybe it’s your children or

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1492>

a younger sibling, or your parents as they aged. Maybe it's a career, a business, or even this church that you have loved for so long. In that moment, you realize you have done all that you can do. You've worked for years, imparting your wisdom, preparing them for the future, protecting them at all costs...but now you must let go. Now you must release it all into the care of another.

It makes sense why the words of this prayer seem so jumbled and muddled. Moments like these are hard. What do you say? What should you say? You want to throw in a lifetime's worth of advice, yet you realize in the moment that a thousand lifetime's could not prepare you for letting go.

Reflecting on Jesus' prayer, he doesn't ask God to take his disciples with him, nor does he ask that they be taken out of the world, out of the pain, out of the struggle that will be ahead. He only asks that God protects them.

Jesus had a mission, but that mission was not finished. So now, Jesus must hand it off to his Disciples. Protect them, God, while they finish the work that you gave me to do.

I read the additional verses, the next two verses after our reading ended, because in them Jesus is still praying, and there he makes a shift. He had been praying about his disciples, the twelve, those whom he called out from lives of fishing and tax collecting, into apprenticeship with him. But at the end, Jesus changes his language: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one."

Did you hear it? He's praying for us. Not just for them, but for us.

Have you ever thought about Jesus praying for you? Jesus, asking God to protect you, and me, and this church, so that we can continue Jesus' work in this place. Wow. All the way back then, before Norwalk Christian Church was ever a thing--before Norwalk or even Iowa was ever a thing--Jesus prayed for us.

That we would have courage. That we would be safe. That we would not leave the world, but that we would get out *into* the world and continue Jesus' work in this world. On the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus prayed for us. Jesus prayed for you.

And he's still praying.

It's a good thing. Because we need all the prayer we can get! We got problems. This world is hard. Life together is hard. There is so much pain, so much injustice, so much fear. We need all the prayer we can get!

But be careful what we ask for.

Often as parents, we wish we could keep our children from all the pain of life: heartbreak, disappointment, failure--if we could, we would keep it all from them. But we can't. And we probably shouldn't. Like with our lives, these things are what made us who we are.

As Disciples of Christ, Jesus' prayer for us is not that all our problems would go away, but that we will survive them, and that they will not get in the way of our work. But whatever we do, we are promised this: Jesus is and will continue praying for us.

So this morning, I want you to think about that for a moment. Think about Jesus praying for you. Not you praying to Jesus. But Jesus, praying for you. What do you need Jesus to know? What do you need? What do you want Jesus to pray?

Do you need courage to fight the disease in your body with dignity? Do you simply need to survive the cure?

Do you need forgiveness? Do you need to forgive?
Do you need love? Do you need to love?

Do you need strength to stick with these kids, as they sap all the energy out of you?
Do you need peace as you release them into the world?

Do you need wisdom to know what to do next? Do you need hope, hope that carries you through even when you feel like you have no options left?

Do you need companionship? Courage to do what you know you are called do? Do you need to let go of whatever is holding you back, and live with freedom?

What do you need? What do you want? Jesus is praying for you.

And this church is praying for you, too. For those of you who will graduate, families of those who are graduating...those of you in the trenches raising children, in the trenches of the world working jobs and making ends meet, those caring for the sick, caring for your loved ones as they are passing away from you...we are praying for you.

That God will protect you, and that God will protect us--not keep us from the world, not keep us safe inside these walls, but that we will put feet to Jesus' prayer and Get Out into the world that God so loves, finishing the mission of Jesus, and answering Jesus' prayer.

Would you pray now with me:

Dear God, whose love knows no ending, we know this life is beautiful and difficult and sometimes both at the same time. We do not ask that you take us out of this world, but that you support and protect us while we are in it. We pray that you would set us apart in the truth we have heard here, that your love is for everyone, and we ask that you would send us out from this place to bear witness in word and deed to your grace, goodness and love. May we hear your voice calling us at home and at work, at school, our social settings, and the places we gather and volunteer, that we might feel and share your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the who prays for us and with us. Amen.²

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/easter-7-b-called-and-sent/>