

Today is Mother’s Day, a day to honor our Moms. We learn a lot from our Moms. My mother taught me religion. She used to say things like: “You better pray that comes out of the carpet.” My mother taught me medicine: “Stop crossing your eyes, or they’ll freeze like that.” My mother taught me how to be a contortionist: “Will you look at the dirt on the back of your neck!” My mother taught me to appreciate a job well done: “If you’re going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning in here!” My mother taught me about genetics: “You can be just like your father!” And my mother taught me about logic: “Why? Because I said so.” I don’t know if any of you had mothers like that, or maybe we all had mothers like that at times.

Well, Jesus is not the “parent” of his followers but his love for them is at least as fierce as that of a mother or father. Jesus also knows that the success of his mission depends on his disciples *staying* in this world and not cocooning themselves someplace far away from those who desperately need to hear the Gospel. No, the only way this thing is going to work is if the disciples continue to labor right in the middle of the same fallen world in which the Son of the Living God would be arrested, tortured, and then nailed to a slab of wood. *That* was the world in which they would have to work and *that* was why Jesus had to spend so much of this prayer begging his Father to give them all the help, all the tools, all the protection, all the support he could provide.

If ever we in the church needed a reality check as to what we should expect when serving in the world, the transparency of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 should remind us we should NOT expect smooth sailing. Yet so many people seem to expect just that. Too many church leaders are surprisingly shocked when they encounter resistance to the message of the Gospel. It’s as though we cannot believe there would actually be atheists around, or that there are people who would prefer we not pray in public, or those who take a view of greed or lust or envy that is so clearly incompatible with what God’s word has revealed to us.

But why should this surprise us? Jesus knew what we would be facing. Jesus prayed for protection, joy, and strength for the disciples, but he did so precisely because he did not think the world was going to be any more receptive to the coming of God's kingdom than it was in his lifetime. The truth is, we need all the prayers we can get as followers of Jesus, but the main reason we need the prayers is because Jesus knew all the tricks that the evil one will use to trip us up. We ought to expect nothing less. The really great news is that Jesus is still praying for us—even now—at the right hand of his Father.

Humorist Erma Bombeck knew both the joys and sadness of having children. Years ago, she wrote “I see children as kites. You spend a lifetime trying to get them off the ground. You run with them until you're both breathless—they crash—they hit the rooftop—you patch and comfort, adjust and teach. You watch them lifted by the wind and assure them that someday they'll fly. Finally, they're airborne and they need more string. But with each turn of the ball of twine, there is a sadness that goes with joy. The kite becomes more distant, and you know it won't be long before that beautiful creature will snap the lifeline that binds you together and will soar as it is meant to; free and alone. Only then do you know that you did your job.”

Listening to Erma Bombeck, I think about friends that move away. I feel the loss to our church family. Our friend Beth Hobbs moved last week to be closer to her sister and family in Texas. When I spoke to her before the move Beth couldn't stop crying because Ken Mawr wasn't just a place that felt like home to her. It *was* home. A classmate of mine once said, “You're only as happy as your unhappiest child.” She's right. But we all know we cannot insure the happiness of our children or our friends. Besides, the wider world in which we want our friends and children to be happy most assuredly cannot be counted on to make that happiness a reality. In fact, the wider world has millions of jagged edges ready to tear into any person's happiness and calm at a moment's notice.

Lately I've been wondering about what we teach our children. It's important to note that when we baptize children in our church, we ask parents about their

commitments before splashing water on their kids. President Woodrow Wilson said, “If you wish your children to be Christians you must really take the trouble to be Christians yourselves. Those are the only terms upon which this miracle will work in a home.” Jesus prays for us—his children. Jesus prays, “*Protect them by the power of your name.*” Shouldn’t we all remember that prayer? Jesus prayed that all will be well. Then he adds, “*that they may be one as we are one*” (v. 11). That the church have the same oneness that exists between Jesus and his Father. Yet churches today seem to be filled with more quarreling and fighting. Even so, it is Jesus’ fervent prayer that we be “one.”

Remember too that Jesus first looked toward heaven and prayed this prayer from John 17 *in front of* his disciples and there was probably a very good reason for this. I have prayed *for* our congregation—and prayed *in front of* our congregation—in ways that express my genuine gratitude for the members of Jesus’ flock at Ken Mawr. But I have also prayed what you might call “aspirational” prayers for things that I wish were more authentically true of Jesus’ flock at Ken Mawr. Haven’t we all prayed for others something that may not be currently true, but we have prayed *with great expectations*?

Truth be told, Jesus was the only realist in the upper room that night. He alone was ready to face the events John describes in chapter 18 and beyond. And he alone knew he would face these trials alone. He knew all about Peter’s impending denial and he knew the fears and failures of all the disciples. Nevertheless, listen to how he prays for those very same men! The incredibly good news is that after Pentecost, everything Jesus expresses in his prayer about his band of followers would come true. At the moment, it was an act of sheer love that Jesus prayed the way he did—with *great expectations*. When we love people, we want only the best for them, and we express this in our prayers for them. We want to give thanks for the things worthy of gratitude, but we also see them through a lens of love and compassion so that we pray things that may not be totally absolutely accurate at the moment, but will be gloriously true, by the by, when God brings them about.

Jesus will soon be treated brutally by the forces of this world. Yet his dearest friends on earth do nothing to step in or even to stand with him in his agony and dereliction. Far from being angry with them, Jesus *prays for them*, and he does so in the best possible light. In the New Testament there are countless vignettes that display how much love Jesus has for people and for his followers. But as displays of love go, this prayer rates as one of the finest!

In his commentary on the *Gospel of John*, Dale Bruner makes the claim that it is possible to view Jesus' prayer as John's expanded version of the well-known "Lord's Prayer" that Jesus presents more straightforwardly in the synoptic Gospels. Verse 1 contains the equivalent of "*Our Father in heaven.*" Verse 2's talk about glorifying the Son that he may glorify the Father can be a gloss on "*Hallowed be your name.*" Verses 11-12 contain talk of the ongoing presence of the disciples in the world and this could be a version of "*Your kingdom come*" even as verse 15 can be seen as a "*Your will be done,*" and "*deliver us from evil.*" Just beyond this passage in verses 20-24 one can also locate versions of "*Forgive us our debts*" and "*Lead us not into temptation.*" Whether Bruner's idea works here is open for debate, but at the very least the similarities he notes shows that Jesus was consistent in his own prayer life, in his view of the Father, and in what we all need to pray for in this world.

In 1939 C.S. Lewis said something in Chapel at Oxford University almost 85 years ago. Hitler had invaded Poland only six weeks earlier, and England was at war. The undergraduate students at Oxford were frightened. Many of them would soon be thrust into battle and many would face death. This is what Lewis told them: "If we had foolish unchristian hopes about human [nature], they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven here on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of mankind, we are now disillusioned, and not a moment too soon." The world is a very dangerous place. There is much that is good about this world and this life.

Daily, we are showered with God's good gifts, and we are right to take joy in them now and hope that we and our children can take joy in such things in the future. But final security and ultimate hope are not going to emerge from what we or any nation can achieve this side of God's coming kingdom. That hardly means that Christians have nothing to say.

There is something to say and I say it to all, but perhaps especially, to our youth. For every one of you there was probably a Sunday when your mom or dad (or both) brought you to this baptismal font or one like it in some other church. I don't know exactly what was going through your parents' minds back then or how they pictured what baptism means. But when Christian parents bring a child to the baptismal font, we are admitting that on our own, we cannot guarantee our child's future. In baptism we let God claim you. We hand your soul over to God through Christ, in whose hands alone you will be safe forever, in both life and in death. Jesus who met you in baptism is our only comfort. There is ultimately no other security in this world. Not really. So, we parents let God claim you. In baptism, God told us and our children and all who are baptized, "I've got you!" Next Sunday 8 Confirmation students will reply to God by saying, "Lord, I believe! And I plan to stay put in your love."

It's a rough world. So, I urge all of you, in view of God's mercies, do not conform to the roughness of this world, do not go with the flow of hatred and revenge, but be transformed from the inside out. Return every day to the love of God in Jesus that scooped you up at the baptismal font years ago. Rest secure in that love. And then let it help you be loving, too. Let love, not hate; good, not evil; guide you until that day when the love and grace of Jesus is your all in all. Remember that you're baptized! So, whether you live or die, you belong to the Lord. Rest in that hope, and go forward in trusting faith, knowing that this world belongs to God *and so do you!*

And let the grace of God motivate you to do the important work of figuring out what God wants from you, because I know that Jesus has *great expectations*—of us all! Amen.