

**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
MAY 8, 2016**

"PRAY FOR ME, JESUS"

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Our simple EASTER PRAYER for today: *PRAY FOR ME, JESUS!* After all, if we are going to be *WALKING WITH JESUS* through this Easter season, we need all the prayers we can get! And how does Jesus respond? He PRAYS! And in His prayer He says, *"As You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, may they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."* When we call, He answers! When we come together, He is with us! Every day is a celebration of Jesus in our lives. Every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Every day is a good day to say: CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

While we may not understand everything that Jesus says in His prayer in today's Gospel, there is one line that we must take very seriously. NOT BECAUSE the world is getting smaller all the time and Churches have to learn to work together. NOT BECAUSE the Christian Church is not growing as fast as some other non-denominational religions. NOT BECAUSE different denominations are beginning to talk to one another. NOT BECAUSE there are so many different denominations in the first place. NOT BECAUSE independent and non-denominational, storefront and suburban mega-churches are popping up like weeds in the garden, and growing fast. NOT EVEN BECAUSE there are more than 15 different kinds of Lutherans in this country alone! AND NOT EVEN BECAUSE our own Lutheran Church has established fellowship agreements with so many other mainline Protestant Churches. We need to hear what Jesus is saying and praying NOT BECAUSE it is the survival of the Church that is at stake here.

There is one line from Jesus' prayer that we need to take seriously because, RIGHT NOW Jesus is PRAYING FOR US! Not for someone else! Not for someone in Philadelphia! Not for someone in Chicago! Not for someone outside the Church family! Not for someone who isn't Lutheran or isn't Protestant or isn't even Christian. At this moment in time Jesus is praying for us! For you and you and you... and for me! Jesus prays: *"THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE, I IN THEM AND YOU IN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE."* Jesus prays: That we may be ONE! That each of us may be ONE with God our Father, ONE with Jesus our Savior and ONE with the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to get up and go!

Jesus prays that we might be ONE! But what we THINK we hear and what we DO hear can be two different things. What we think we hear Jesus praying for is UNITY! You know, everybody together in one big happy family. But take a look at the Church. In fact take a look at the Church right from the very beginning. If there is one thing we can say about the Church, it is that UNITY has never been our number 1 priority!

In the Church's first century of existence it was so concerned about establishing creeds and doctrines that it saw heresy and treachery everywhere. And it dealt with them, in the same way that Christians themselves were first dealt with. If you want to eliminate the problem, you eliminate the person.

Once the Church got beyond that, and since the time of the Reformation, the CHURCH has become CHURCH-ES! And so what we have today are denominations, and independent churches and community churches and churches that are obsessed with being known for what makes them different, rather than what makes THEM and US, THE CHURCH. And Jesus is still praying THAT WE MAY BE ONE!

The problem is, we have confused Jesus' promise "to be one" with our own idea that TO BE ONE means we have to think alike, and act alike, and sometimes even LOOK alike. Jesus did not say that the spirit-born Church would produce clones of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John or any other saint for that matter.

Jesus prays and Jesus promises that each and every member of His family, each and every child of God, each and every one of us, can be one and will be one, can be united and will be united, by a much greater power. By a totally different idea of unity than we will ever have! Jesus did not pray for the unity of the Church as an institution. The PROMISE and the ANSWER to Jesus prayer is this: WE ARE, EACH ONE OF US, INDIVIDUALLY AND PERSONALLY, ONE WITH GOD OUR FATHER, ONE WITH JESUS OUR SAVIOR AND ONE IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT!

Jesus did not establish a clone church! Jesus gave birth, through the power of the Spirit to millions and billions of people, past, present and future, individual children of God whose mind is filled with faith, whose heart is filled with love and whose life is filled with service to God and to all of God's creation.

It is time to stop trying to make other people look just like we look, sound just like we sound, and act just like we act. It is time to stop trying to make people just like us, and start encouraging everyone to be what God made them to be. UNITY BEGINS by CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES, and doing it TOGETHER! And to be ONE IN JESUS CHRIST is to know that we have more in common than not!

When we let ourselves be the musical instrument, with all the individual notes and tones, and when God hits the right notes at the right times, and the right combination of notes at the right times, then beautiful things happen. Beautiful notes, beautiful lives, beautiful service. In other words, when we are touched by God, God makes beautiful things happen in us, through us and by us. And so we say: PRAY FOR ME, JESUS.

The Church happens when we believe that we really are: ONE WITH GOD OUR FATHER, ONE WITH JESUS OUR SAVIOR AND ONE IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT!

We all come from different backgrounds. We all come with different skills and abilities. But when we come together we have a common bond. And in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are the answer to His prayer. Together we speak the name of JESUS, the One who is the same today tomorrow and forever. We speak the name of JESUS who is the Savior of you and you... and of me.

And in His name we are united. That UNITY is the PROMISE and the ANSWER to JESUS' PRAYER.

But we will continue to say: PRAY FOR ME, JESUS.

And to that prayer, all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!