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SOMEONE IS PRAYING FOR YOU!

If you said all of your prayers out loud, your life would pretty much be an open book to anyone who was listening. If you listened to my prayers or my wife’s prayers, you would learn a lot about my family. We pray for each of our children’s needs. You would find out, for example, that my youngest son is spending three months in a research lab in Thailand, and that the government in that country is not very stable at the present time. You would hear about a relative who is struggling to fight an addiction and to get her life back on track. You would learn about a young pastor in the district whose eight year old son is fighting cancer. Your prayer life tells a lot about your story, and about what’s on your heart.

Jesus prayed often. He sometimes went by himself to the mountains to pray, sometimes praying well into the night and even through the night. No one prayed more fervently and better than Jesus did. Few of those prayers are recorded for us. And those that are recorded for us are mostly very short. Sometimes, like the prayers from the cross, Jesus spoke just a single sentence.

Isn’t that also true of ourselves? I heard about a preschool in our synod that was close to the fire department. Every time the trucks rolled the siren wailed, the children would run to the window. So the teacher taught them to pray for the firemen as they were going out to the fire. We can do the same things. We see someone in need, and we can pray for that person. It might only be a sentence or two.

In our text, we have the first part of the longest prayer of Jesus that is recorded for us. We sometimes call it the “high priestly prayer” of Jesus. The Bible calls Jesus our “high priest” for two reasons. One is that he offered his life as a sacrifice for our sins. The other is that Jesus prays for us today at God’s right hand, the same way he prayed for the disciples in our text. Isn’t that a comforting feeling – knowing that Jesus is praying for you by name before God’s throne in heaven? Let’s look at Jesus’ prayer.

I. Jesus prayed for himself

“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory

I had with you before the world began.” I don’t know if the disciples fully understood what Jesus was talking about – because they were on the other side of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. They were like the baseball fans that left the stadium in the eighth inning to beat the traffic on the way home, because their home team was down by 8 runs, only to find out when they got home that their team scored ten runs in the bottom of the ninth. The disciples couldn’t see what lay ahead, the way Jesus could see it, and the way we can see it now.

Jesus speaks to his heavenly Father about what was about to happen. **“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”** From our perspective, we see this work, this wonderful plan of salvation, completed. It’s like being able to see all the stained glass windows in our church in a glance. In the first window, we see God’s beautiful creation and we see the fall into sin through the snake, the devil, that tempted Adam and Eve. In the second window, we see what sin does to people. It destroys them, the way God destroyed the people in the flood. We can feel the despair of sin in that window, and it reflects the feeling that sin gives us in our hearts as well. Then we have the story of the birth of Jesus. How did Jesus pray? **“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”** The Son of God was there at creation, even before there were angels. The Son of God shared in equal glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But for a time, God the Son left that throne of glory in heaven and chose to live among us, clothed in human flesh. He never stopped being God, but he chose to wear our humanity, with all its bumps and bruises and temptations.

Then, after thirty-three years of perfect living as a child of God, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. The priests in the Old Testament could offer lambs on their altar. There was no lamb that God could offer except his own lamb, the perfect Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Only the blood of Jesus could wash away the stains of our sins. When Jesus said, “It is finished!” on the cross, he completed the assignment God gave him – and God was glorified.

In the song, “How Great Thou Art,” the first two verses sing about the glory of God’s creation. “O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made.” The trees, the mountains, the birds, the steams and the gentle breeze – God is glorified by his creation. Then in the third verse it says, “And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing He bled and died to take away my sin.” This is what brings God glory more than anything else!

All that was left was for God the Father to glorify his Son – and Jesus prays for his Father to do this. This is what the resurrection and the ascension is all about. Does it seem strange that Jesus should pray this for himself? I want you to think about the image of an Olympic athlete standing on the podium with the gold medal around her neck. Tears well in her eyes as the U. S. flag is raised and she sings the national anthem. When we watch that scene, we all feel the accomplishment because she competed for every one of us in that Olympic contest. In the same way, God glorified Jesus by his resurrection and his ascension to sit at his right hand in heaven. All glory in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus, because he deserved it. He won the victory over sin and death and hell. And he did it for us. He shared his victory with each and every one of us.

II. **Jesus prays for his disciples**

Now Jesus begins to pray for his disciples. **“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.”** Jesus had spent three years with his disciples. He taught them God’s Word and they listened. This was

more than just a casual, once a week class that the disciples had with Jesus. They spent every day with Jesus. They were with him when they got up in the morning and they were with him when they went to sleep at night. They didn't get a spring break or a summer vacation.

And the disciples believed in Jesus. At times their faith may have been weak. At times they made mistakes, and sometimes they asked dumb questions and gave foolish answers. But they did believe in Jesus. Jesus knew their faith was going to be tested, so he prayed for them. **"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. 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."** Do you think Jesus had Peter in mind when he stood by and denied Jesus three times? Or the rest of the disciples who forsook him and fled? Was he thinking of Thomas who doubted the resurrection? Jesus prayed for them and God preserved their faith and kept them close to his Word.

These words that Jesus prayed really apply to the disciples who were with them that evening. How do we know that Jesus also prays for us? The writer to the Hebrews tells us so. Jesus **"is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them"** (Hebrews 7:27). Paul teaches us the same thing in that section in Romans 8 where he tells us why we can be sure of our salvation. **"Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"** (Romans 8:32). This is one of the comforts that we have in Jesus' ascension. We have a friend at God's right hand who is always interceding for us.

Friends, I find this truth very comforting. Six years ago when I had my heart attack, I learned later that many, many people prayed for me. I know that you did. But I heard from people all over the country who said they prayed for me in their church. A pastor told me that when he had their evening prayers with his children, he accidentally prayed for me by the previous district president's name. His child said, "No, daddy, not Pastor Cross, Pastor Degner!" Imagine having a pastor and his children praying for you!

You don't have to be a district president to have someone praying for you. Jesus prays for you before God's throne every single day. Are you struggling with a sin in your life? Does it seem like that sin could take over and ruin your faith? I had a great uncle who lived with us when I as a child. He lived on the farm and helped out because he wasn't responsible enough to hold down a job. He had a drinking problem. He would go uptown three or four times a week and drink too much. Yet, in all those years, he also went to church every Sunday. The year before he died, he gave up drinking altogether. Don't you think that Jesus was praying for him all those years that his faith would not fail, that his sin would not overwhelm him?

What about the difficult times in your life? Sometimes the circumstances of our lives can seem overwhelming. There was a young pastor in our synod this last year who found out in February that he had skin cancer – a serious melanoma. Within in two months God called him home to heaven. He left behind a widow and a small child and a small mountain of college debt. I learned recently that his widow is also carrying their second child. Can you imagine our Savior at God's right hand keeping this family in his prayers every single day, that life's troubles would not overwhelm them?

What about when you send your graduate off to college next fall? You know how dangerous those years can be to a person's faith. You will keep your child in your prayers every day. But you know how kids are. They won't tell you what's REALLY happening in their lives. Jesus knows. Jesus is always with us and with our children. He is praying for your child every day about all the temptations they will face, all the troubles that come their way.

So go home today with this comforting thought. Someone – and that someone is Jesus – is praying for you. Amen.

