

**Let Us Pray**

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**John 17:1-26**

Wow! How’d that feel to be in the presence of Jesus in the upper room and hear Jesus talking to Our Father in Heaven about his disciples and about you? I love the fact Jesus took some of the precious few moments he had left on earth to pray, but even more, when He prayed, it wasn’t the self-serving prayer I would have offered up, but a self-less prayer, offering up his love for his disciples, including the ones that would come in the future because of the witness of those first apostles. That, in case you missed it, is all of us. We’re the ones, Jesus took time on his last night of freedom, to pray for. He prayed for you and for me. Incredible to think about, but also to experience.

I wonder how the disciples felt when they realized Jesus was praying for them… When someone prays for me, out loud, in my presence, I feel very mixed emotions. First, I feel a little embarrassed. Being the center of attention isn’t a natural thing for me. People say I’m a big ham and like the attention, but the truth is, I’d just as soon be left unnoticed on the sidelines. Only because of the Holy Spirit am I able to be up here in front of you all… After the embarrassment phase comes the humbling phase. When I overhear someone talking to God about me and asking for God to help me in my ministry and in my life, I am humbled that God even knows who I am let alone God would care about the things I’m doing. Finally, there comes the best part of it all, the encouragement phase. In the end, after it’s over, I feel encouraged when someone prays for me and the things that matter to me. It does encourage me to know people have taken their busy time to pray about me and the things that are important to me.

Psychologists tell us the best way to encourage someone is to compliment them in the presence of someone important in their lives. Here’s what I mean. Last week when all the ladies were partying here at the Mother-Daughter-Friend Banquet, Trevor and I took the Angles boys, Stephen, Micah, and Gabriel to Youngs Jersey Dairy. We had a lot of fun petting the animals and eating ice cream. By the time we got back, Niki was already at our house waiting to take all the kids home and get them ready for bed. Of course, she asked how they behaved for grandpa. In front of all three I told her how good they all were. I mentioned each one by name and let her know what each one did that was nice and helpful. You should have seen how Micah’s face lit up when I talked about how he helped hold Gabe’s hand as we walked across the parking lot and how he never once left the group to go and do his own thing even when we were doing something he wasn’t particularly interested in. Not only did his face light up, but his whole body posture changed. He stood up a little taller and his chest stuck out as if to say, “Yep, that’s me he’s talkin about!”

I think that’s kind of what happens when someone prays for us, out loud, when we’re there to hear it. Jesus did that in his prayer. It’s just one short line and you might have just glossed over it and missed it altogether, but he said, “They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” They have kept your word… They haven’t done much else yet, but Jesus found something positive to say about them, to Our Father in Heaven, out loud, and in their presence so they could hear. Jesus encouraged his followers by bragging about them to our Heavenly Father.

In our prayers we often ask God to do this or that and most of the time the things we ask for are for other people or good and noble causes. We ask for healing for someone who is sick or we ask for a job for someone who is jobless. We ask for safety for those traveling or for those who work in jobs that are dangerous. We ask for abundant harvests for food to feed all the world’s people and for clean water for all to drink. All these petitions and many more we pray are wonderful and God loves all our prayers. Today I want us to notice something we might be missing though. Can we include in our prayers some of the people who we see all around us making a difference in our lives and in God’s Kingdom? Let us pray for the officers of our congregation. Thanks be to God that God has called these fine men and women to lead us and to manage the business affairs of this congregation. Thanks for our president who brings us to order and gives us an agenda to follow. Let us pray for our treasurers who spend so much time keeping track of the money we all give and making sure it gets spent in God pleasing ways. Let us pray for our secretaries, both in the Church Office and our Council Recording Secretary. They toil away in order that we might know what’s happening in our congregation at our meetings and in the preparation of our documents for worship and for our legacy. Let us pray for the leaders of our Sunday School and all those who God has called to teach our Children. We entrust these wonderful people to pass along our faith to the next generation. May God continue to bless their important work. Let us pray for all those who give so selflessly of their time, talents, and treasures to support the many ministries of this congregation. For our Prayers and Squares Quilters. May your minds be creative and your hands be busy bringing that creativity to life in the beautiful quilts that will warm the bodies and the souls of the people who receive them. For those who plan for and set up the space and bake cookies for our blood drives twice a year. For the ones who continue to support the Christmas families, the annual auction, and the Christmas Child boxes. For all those who support the charities sponsored by the women’s group and for the children who help in purchasing the Christmas presents for our Christmas families. For all who prepare and serve at the Grace Resurrection Soup Kitchen and for the FISH Pantry workers who give their time every Friday afternoon.

Now I’m absolutely certain there are so many more things people of this congregation are doing out there in the world that I’m not aware of, but you are. Wouldn’t it be great if we bragged about them to God and let God know how thankful we are they are called and blessed and sent into the world full of faith and the excitement to be doing God’s will here and now. Wouldn’t it be great to encourage them by recognizing their good works before God? Maybe, just maybe you’d get the awesome privilege of seeing someone you love stand a little taller and stick their chest out a little further as if to say, “Yep that’s my God using me to do His will and to make a difference in this hurting part of the world. Thanks for noticing what God’s doing!”

I don’t know all the ways to make this kind of prayer of thanksgiving and encouragement more prevalent in our prayer lives, but I’m going to encourage you all to think of things to add to our prayer book in the back. Let us pray in ways that recognize where God is working through someone to bring about a little piece of heaven right here on earth. Also, another place we can make this happen is in our newsletter. We have two places there we can recognize God working through our family and friends. In our monthly prayer section of course. You can let me or Sharon, our Church Secretary know about someone you would like recognized for addition to our Monthly Prayers in the newsletter. The second place is in a newer section in the newsletter called “Did You Know.” Typically, we put things of general life interest in this section like someone just made the Dean’s list or got straight As on their report card or getting married or things like that. What if you all started intentionally looking for the things God is doing through your family and friends and wrote them up in a short paragraph or two for the newsletter. The person you write about would be encouraged, we would all be encouraged by their example, and most importantly people would see their good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Doesn’t that also sound like a good way to fulfill one of our Baptismal promises?

May we all take a close look at this “High Priestly Prayer” in Chapter 17 of the Gospel According to John. May we discover you don’t have to be a “High Priest” to pray like Jesus prayed. We can all follow Jesus example and one of those ways is to recognize and give thanks for the ways God is using us to make a difference in this world. May we never shy away from allowing our good works to be seen by others so that our Father in Heaven is given praise, honor, and glory. May you be blessed in your own work or vocation of ministry in God’s name. May the God who created you, strengthen you for the work of the ministry of the Gospel, amen.