

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here is a modern parable:

“I see children as kites. You spend a lifetime trying to get them off the ground. You run with them until you are 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 will fly. Finally, they are airborne. They need more string and you keep letting it out. But with each twist of the ball of twine, there is a sadness that goes with the joy. The kite becomes more distant, and you know it will not be long before that beautiful creature will snap the lifeline that binds you together and will soar as it is meant to soar: free and alone. Only then do you know that you did your job.”

How appropriate...in the middle of graduation seasons: college celebrating right now, and high school only a month away. Our young men and women leave one world and enter a new one. Like the kite, they will eventually be expected to build a career, find a lifemate, move out...separating themselves in fundamental ways from their families. The bar gets raised, the challenges of life become more complex with the end of free room and board, responsibility to pay their own bills. An expectation of work will be on the horizon, sooner or later, along with making new friends, and living in a potentially hostile environment.

This world is quite different from the world that I grew up in. The world is much smaller and we can communicate anywhere in the world instantaneously. Costs of living like utilities, rent and health insurance are very expensive. The world travels in the fast lane and many people do whatever is necessary to survive, even if it means stepping on other people in the way.

Hopefully, parents, teachers, and the community have prepared our young people for this new and different world.

And, what about the church? We struggle to live as Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to say nothing of being relevant examples of faithfulness for the youth. If we were a college town, like Cazenovia or Hamilton or Clinton or Morrisville, this would make sense. There is the one about the tavern near the college campus, a favorite of the students. As Parents' Weekend approached, they posted a sign that said, "Bring your parents to lunch. We will pretend we don't know you." A local church countered with a signboard that read, "Bring your parents to church. We will pretend we **do** know you."

It is quite natural to have mixed emotions upon the changes in relationship and life that come

with growing up and away. And yet, as people of faith, we have still another layer of emotion, or consideration, that seems to complicate things a bit further....all as we generally think of ourselves as the adults letting go. Consider ourselves to be the persons holding the kite strings.

But, enter now, into all of that, the gospel lesson we have today from John, Chapter 17.

Now we have a different perspective of relationship. No longer the adults, regardless of our age.

No, we have been...are now...and will always be the children. The children of God.

And, what is more, we are reminded from the gospel reading last week that we are the friends of Jesus. And today, we hear the prayer of Jesus as if we were right there.

This event of the gospel is called the High Priestly Prayer. It occurs right after Jesus has the last supper with his disciples. He has washed their feet and given them his last teaching for them, and now he prays to God...at the point in their relationship when he is letting their kite strings go.

It is a compound prayer, but it is critical to acknowledge...and to learn from..the essential elements of it in order to gain insight from God as to our proper priorities, because it was...and continues to be...a prayer for the Church. You and me, as well as those disciples two millennia ago.

First, he prays that God protect them from the evil one. That is a continual struggle, and it is no surprise that our liturgies fill the need. When we baptize persons and when we reaffirm our own baptismal vows, we recommit to renouncing all evil. When we gather, like now, to confess our sins against God and our neighbor, we ask for God's continual forgiveness of us. All of it, and of course much more, consciously focuses us in areas we normally do not want to address, and causes us to be honest with our failings, before God and before each other. In other words, being a Christian really means always facing up to the fact that we are NOT perfect...and that we need God's help in the "facing up" part.

Jesus also prays that God will be with us in the world. Why? Because, if they...and we...are truly the disciples of Jesus, they and we are different. While living in the world, they...and we..should represent "another world.": the one of the followers of Christ, disciples of God's kingdom. Disciples, because of their faith, will be tested and will not always be accepted. Why? It will be more important to help their neighbors than be successful. Relationships with people will matter more than material things. Their language will be the language of love and unlike the world in which they live they will make sacrifices and align themselves with the oppressed, the meek, the lost.

Few will be able to embrace it. It will be easier to give into the ways of the world and look, talk, act and feel like everyone else. And yet, Jesus is counting on his followers to "keep the faith." Be a presence in a world where some remain connected to the kingdom of God. Take advantage of the

resources the world creates and use them to witness to the gospel. Use the tools and take advantage of all available resources to be faithful to the task of building the kingdom of God...doing the work that God has given us to do.

In his prayer to God, Jesus asks for protection “in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” Jesus knows that, for the disciples, disunity or divisiveness is their greatest threat. What does that mean?

Well, ponder the distinction between disunity or divisiveness on the one hand, and diversity on the other. In the greater Church today, we tend to consider this in terms of labels or classification. Thinking in terms of denominations, and sects. We focus more on how we are different from one another. Yet, Jesus seems to come from another place with this prayer. His focus in prayer is not on the different ways that God may be manifested within the understanding of Episcopalians, or Roman Catholics, or Baptists..that is all diversity, and to be welcomed as the gathering witness of God. No, his focus in this prayer is for continued "oneness" with God, without which we will perish or become "worldly." In other words, he prays for continued relationship with God in the ways that he taught.

And, beside praying that God give us joy in the midst of this world, Jesus prays that we be sanctified...which means that we purified. That we be made holy through the process of transformation, in the gradual and disciplined process that starts from a concentrated decision and continued desire to commit to God...and then? Then, the rest is a mystery that comes from God. The transformation of sanctification is an indefinable gift from God. We will leave it at that.

On this, the eve of the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit we, as the children of God, approach our own kite soaring altitude. Let us join with Jesus in praying to God that we all be protected from evil, that we truly love one another, that we may have true joy, and that we may be set apart, or sanctified, for service in the kingdom of God.

All as blessings in the Name of God, within the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.