

Holding the Space

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

John 17: 6-19

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Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17: 6-19

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

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"I will pray for you."

When we hear of a painful, difficult, delicate situation, when we know that a plan, a goal, a decision, is being discerned, when we hear good news and include gratitude and thanksgiving to God, we say, "I will pray for you."

When we are in need, or have news to share, we appreciate the words, “I will pray for you.”

When we offer to pray for someone, or someone offers to pray for us, there are many gifts being shared.

There is the gift of listening, true deep listening, that hears what is on your heart, hears not only the words spoken aloud, and at least senses the words still beneath the surface that we are not yet ready to share out loud, perhaps even to ourselves.

There are the gifts of time and attention, pausing and slowing down enough to be in that moment, attentive to what is being shared whether it is good or bad, happy or challenging, hopeful or doubtful, wishful or with deep longing. It is time that stops as all else is put aside.

It is taking the words and thoughts of another and lifting them, the situation, the moment, the future, to God, to the One who loves us the most.

It is a gift and blessing to be prayed for as it opens us up to God’s promises, and invites God to help us, as well as those we are praying for. Every prayer is heard by God; which means that every time we pray, or are prayed for, something amazing happens.

St. Therese of Lisieux beautifully said, “Prayer is a surge of the heart, it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

Our hearts respond with an empathetic surge with a need to lift to God’s mercy, peace and grace what has been said to us, what has been the breaking news of violence and grief, what has been ongoing with no resolution in sight, what has broken the heart of the one we are with.

Our hearts respond with a delighted surge with a need to lift to God the cheer and elation of good news, to wrap in joy, thanksgiving and lovingkindness the joyful heart of the one we are with.

Our hearts respond with a hopeful surge with a need to lift to God the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the one, or ones, we are praying for. Inviting God’s presence into the moment enhances and clarifies.

What we are praying for is actually someone’s journey. It may be that we are hearing of a new diagnosis and our prayers not only embrace the rawness of the news, but also mercy, hope and healing for whatever lies ahead.

It may be that we are hearing of the loss of a loved one, and our prayers give thanks for a life as well as for comfort and the blessing of memories for those who are grieving, and now live without the beloved one beside them.

It may be that we hear of a long-awaited pregnancy, and our prayers rise for the parents-to-be and the full, healthy life of the child now cradled in the womb.

It may be that we are hearing of a graduation, an engagement, an important decision, a new job, a move, and our prayers are for the adventure and newness and changes ahead, as we ask for God’s guidance and protection in the midst of our thanksgiving.

There is a phrase for this journey time, ‘holding the space.’ It is said by chaplains, by doulas, by therapists, and it means being willing to walk alongside another person in whatever journey they’re on by creating a safe, accepting environment with empathy and listening but not with judgment or by making them feel inadequateⁱ. Our prayers for someone else are a way of holding the space for them on their journey, a way of placing into God’s hands and God’s care, the path they are traveling. In this time of uncertainty, of newness, of ambiguity, our prayers ask God to be with them in this space.

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear that we are among the ones being prayed for by Jesus. Jesus is actually praying for us. We are among the ones who have space held for us, we

are among the disciples and the followers Jesus is praying for. Jesus had a surge of the heart to lift us all to God for the time yet to be.

As he prayed these words, everything was about to change. Jesus would die, would rise, would ascend to heaven. He would no longer be with them as they had known. They would need to make their own way from what they have learned and heard. They would need to grow in number, beginning with a disciple to be chosen after Jesus has returned to God. There would be generations between the night of this prayer and the day when he would return. Jesus was holding the space of God's love, grace and care for all who followed him.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.... And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Like a mother about to send her child off to college, there has been preparation and anticipation for this time, but now the child is on their own.

No longer present to protect the disciples, Jesus prays, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one."

That they may be one. Yes, there will be many differences among them, but call them back God, hold them together as one.

And then Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth." Sanctify. Set them apart so that they go out into the world yet are apart from the world.

Jesus. Our way, our truth, and our life. Who loves us, who died for us, and who prays for us. Then and now. Praying that we would be protected from evil. Praying that we would be one. And praying that we would be so secure in his truth, that we would be able to rescue those around us, who are struggling to find a truth on which to rest, and to build a life of meaning and hope.ⁱⁱ

Jesus prays for us..... Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/between-the-generations/202305/what-does-it-mean-to-hold-space>

ⁱⁱ James Laurence ~ <https://mypastoralponderings.com/2021/05/15/when-jesus-prayed-for-us-my-sermon-on-john-176-19/>