

JESUS PRAYS FOR US!

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Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Hallandale, FL

May 13, 2018 – 7th Sunday of Easter

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Coral Gables, FL

St. Timothy Lutheran Church

Miami Gardens, FL

Children's Message: *The Most Important Message In The World*

Object: Kite (you can make your own by coloring a piece of paper and attaching a paper or ribbon tail)

Scripture: John 17:6-19

Hymns: Pro: *There Is None Like You* Rec: *There Is None Like You*

Good morning, boys and girls. How many of you have ever flown a kite? They are fun to play with, aren't they? Kites were not originally toys, though. Kites were first invented for the Chinese, and they were used to send messages. The color of the kite, its shape, the patterns painted on the kite were all secret coded messages. Someone would paint a secret message on the kite and then fly the kite up in the air so that other people would be able to see it and read the messages. This was how they sent out very important messages.

The Bible says that we have the most important message on earth. It is the message that God loves each one of us and we are his children. We are never alone and God's presence is always with us. How do we share this message with other people? We don't use kites, do we? We come to church every Sunday, we love all the people around us, and we tell all of our friends about God. That is how we share the most important message in the world. Let's share that important message every day.

DEAR LORD: Help us share with everyone around us the most important message in the world - that you love us are always with us. Amen.

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

Recognizing the great sacrifices mothers around the world make for their children, we say Happy Mother's Day to all our moms. And, also recognizing being a mom is not so easy, allow me to give you some examples of some things a few mothers could have said to their children. For example: Mona Lisa's mother could have said to her daughter Mona: "Mona, after all the money your father and I spent on braces, is that the biggest smile you can give us?" Humpty Dumpty's mother could have said to her son Humpty: "Humpty, if I've told you once, I've told you a 100 times not to sit on that wall. But, you just would you not listen to me!" Michelangelo's mother could have said to her son: "Mike, can't you just paint on walls like other children? Do you have any idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling?" Jonah's mother could have said to her son Jonah: "That's a nice story that you told us about being in the whale, but where have you really been for the last 3 days?"

There is another story told about a little boy who was fascinated by watching his mother gently rub cold cream on her face. The little boy asked his mother, "Why are you rubbing cold cream on your face, mommy?" His mother replied, "To make myself beautiful." A few minutes later, she began removing the cream with a tissue.

Her son then asked, *"What's the matter, Mommy? Don't you want to be beautiful anymore?"* Again, those of you who have children know it's not easy to be as mother

One Mom says that she's going to try something different next summer with their dog and kids. Next summer, she says, she's sending the dog to camp and the kids to obedience school. Some of you who have been mothers understand. After all, what mother has never fallen on her knees when she has gone into her child's bedroom and prayed, *"Please, God, no more - You were only supposed to give me what I could handle."* It's not easy! Or, as someone else once said, *"The hand that rocks the cradle usually is attached to someone who is not getting very much sleep."*

Finally, this last little story told of a couple who was moving across the country. They decided to drive both cars. Their 8 year-old son Nathan worried. *"How will we keep from getting separated?"* Dad reassured him, *"We'll drive slowly. One car can follow the other."* "But," Nathan persisted, *"What if we DO get separated?"* Dad joked, *"Well, then I guess we'll never see each other again,"* Nathan quickly answered. *"Then, I'm gonna ride with Mommy."* Well, that's a pretty smart young fellow if you ask me. Actually, the situation can be summed up in the words of one mother when she said, *"I'd like to be the ideal mother, but I'm too busy raising my kids."* Touché!

Well, once again, Happy Mother's Day 2018 to all our mothers this morning. And, all jokes set aside, this world can be a scary place. And, we have to give it to our mom's. They live their lives to protect their children. Amen! Now, I do not know where you turn for protection from the dangers of this world - martial arts skills, your fists, your ADT home security alarms - but, I would like to believe that most importantly you turn to your faith in Jesus Christ. And, all of this discussion brings us to today's lesson where John captures the closing days of Jesus' life and ministry here on earth.

In today's Gospel, Jesus prays for himself and for his disciples. He is basically praying for 3 things for his disciples and for us. He prays for our **protection, preservation, and perseverance**. **First, Jesus prays for his disciples' protection by becoming unified.** But, note, when Jesus prays for our protection, he doesn't pray for our safety. When we pray for protection, we typically pray that nothing painful or harmful will happen to us. Jesus knew better. He knew pain is unavoidable in this world and he knew his disciples would experience pain because of their devotion to him. So, rather than pray that we might avoid pain, he prays for our UNITY. Read with me the 2nd sentence found in verse 11 of your Gospel, beginning with the words *"Holy Father": Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one!*" Now, why would Jesus pray for unity? The answer is because there is strength in unity. When we can turn to friends and family, it is our *"oneness"* that helps us bear almost any pain or turmoil in times of trouble.

The funny story is told about a church where everyone seemed to be related to the “Tate” family. An old man named *Dic-Tate* wanted to run everything, while *Ro-Tate* tried to change everything. Sister *Agi-Tate* would stir up plenty of trouble with the help of her husband named *Iri-Tate*. Whenever new projects were suggested, *Hesi-Tate* and *Vege-Tate* would want to wait until next year. Then, there was Aunt *Imi-Tate* who wanted the church to be like all others. Uncle *Devas-Tate* always provided the voice of doom and gloom while *Poten-Tate* always wanted to be the bigshot. But, not all the members of the family were bad. *Facili-Tate* was quite helpful in church matters. And, delightful, happy cousin *Medi-Tate* always thought things over and lended a helpful, steady hand to others. And, of course there was the black sheep in the family, *Ampu-Tate*, who had completely cut himself off from the church. And, to all this Jesus prays in this morning’s Gospel, *“I pray that they all be one.”* Unity in the church is important! Amen!

Renowned preacher Barbara Brown Taylor gives us a picture of a church where unity provides comfort and security. She describes how unity brings comfort and security to a certain woman with a recurrent cancer who is told she has 6 months to live. *“The church gathers around her and her husband - laying hands on them, bringing them casseroles and cleaning their house. Someone comes up with the idea of giving the woman a foot massage and painting her toenails red, which does more for her spirits than any visit from the pastor. This woman with terminal cancer prepares to die, but instead, she gets better. On Christmas Eve she is back in church for the 1st time in months, with her oxygen tank slung over her shoulder and a clear plastic tube running under her nose. After the first hymn, she makes her way to the lectern to read the lesson from Isaiah, Her tank hisses every 5 seconds. Every candle in the place glitters in her eyes. She reads, ‘Strengthen the weak hands; and, make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.’ When she sits down, the congregation knows they have not just heard the word of the Lord, they have seen it in action.”* Do you see the healing in such unity. When our whole congregation at BLC/SMLC/STLC comes together, we can bring someone hope, comfort, and security.

2ndly, Jesus prays for our preservation. Jesus prays that none of us will ever slip away from our faith in God. The Psalmist (91:11-12) puts it this way: *“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”* Jesus’ exact words in today’s Gospel can be found in the 2nd half of verse 15. Jesus prays, (read it with me): *“I ask that you protect them from the evil one.”* Jesus himself holds us in the palm of his hand. He will not let us go. Psalm 121:8 tells us: *“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.”* As the 23rd Psalm says ever so clear, *“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”* Jesus prays for our preservation.

Finally, Jesus prays for our perseverance. He prays that we will be steadfast in the faith. Jesus says in today’s Gospel, verse 13 – read verse 13 with me, please: *“But, now I am coming to you, and I speak of these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.”* You can see why Jesus

prayed for those early believers' perseverance - the whole world depended on them. If they had not done their duty to witness to Christ and his resurrection, this would be an entirely different world. It is impossible to overstate the difference that the coming of Christ made in the world. Jesus taught us compassion, understanding, acceptance, mercy, and forgiveness. He taught us to love our neighbor as he first loved us. These teachings of Christ made a difference in the world over 2000 years ago. And, the only way they can still make a difference in the world today is if we - you me, this very BLC/SMLC/STLC persevere in the faith. Yes, Jesus prays for our perseverance.

In closing, let me now tell you about a visit I once made to a greyhound track. As you probably know, these greyhounds are trained to chase a mechanical rabbit around the track. The remote-control rabbit goes just fast enough to stay ahead of the dogs. Well, a few years ago, I saw all these dogs crouched in their cages, waiting for the start of the race. The starting gun sounded. The cage doors dropped open, and the dogs took off after the mechanical rabbit. As the rabbit rounded the 1st turn, however, something incredible happened. An electrical short caused the rabbit to explode and catch on fire. In seconds, all that was left of the rabbit was some black stuff hanging on a bit of wire. When that happened, the dogs were so confused they didn't know what to do. Most of the dogs stopped running. Some of them just lay down on the track. Of course, not one dog finished the race. I often think we as individuals and as the church are sometimes like those greyhounds. As Christians, we sometimes have forgotten our purpose and why we exist. But, today's Gospel reminds us how Jesus has prayed for us and continues to pray for us, and we are reminded why we exist. We exist to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. Where Jesus' love is unknown, there is darkness. Where Christ love is known, there is light and our joy can be made complete. And, let me tell you, if *"Christ's kingdom is to ever come and if his will is to ever be done on earth as it is in heaven"* - it's up to you and me to persevere and make Christ's love and light known. As Christ continues to pray for your protection, preservation, and perseverance, show your mother's love, your Father in heaven's love, share his light and love with one another today, now, and forevermore. Amen.