

**The Seventh Sunday of Easter • June 5, 2011**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

*Rev. Braun Campbell*

John 17:1-11

"Entrusted"

Now that Memorial Day has come and gone, it seems like we're really moving into summer in our part of the country. And after talking with some students in our congregation, it doesn't seem like summer vacation can come soon enough. (Many of the teachers that I know agree!) With summer comes a shifting of schedules as people make plans on how to use their time, especially if they're not going to be locked into school schedules. Here at St. John's, we're going to be trying out something different this summer by holding a combined Sunday morning service in July and August (in addition to our regular Saturday worship). For nine Sundays, we'll come together for the Divine Service at 10:00 a.m. instead of having an early service and late service. The feedback that we've received on this temporary shift has largely been positive, with people looking forward to worshipping with the larger community of St. John's that doesn't necessarily attend the service that they do; however, we've also heard from some who have expressed concern about not having a service offered at the regular times. Pastor Meehan and I, along with the elected servant leaders of our congregation, want to better understand what's on the hearts and minds of the people in our community. In listening to some of the concerns about this change in service times for those nine Sundays, though, something troubling began to show itself: **we are in danger of becoming accustomed to convenience.** Living in a time and place where we can pick and choose how to be entertained, what to buy at the supermarket or shopping mall, which coffee shop to visit for a latte – even which church to go to for worship – **we all too easily fall into acting like consumers in our spiritual and religious life.** Our priorities get out of joint. That's how it is with sin. We get wrapped up in ourselves and our own plans and we lose sight of what's truly important. It doesn't matter if you normally participate in the Saturday worship service or the early or late Sunday morning services – or, like some of us, if you're at all three services – if you're looking to plan how you might fit "time with God" into *your* schedule, then you are operating under a fundamentally flawed premise.

In his message last weekend, Pastor Meehan directed us to how God prepares us and keeps us prepared for service in His kingdom, recalling the massive tornado that hit Joplin, MO. My goddaughter's house was in the dead center of that tornado's path. When it hit, her father, my friend and classmate at the seminary, put both of the girls into the bathtub and climbed in on top of them to shield them from debris. When they climbed out from the rubble that had been their house, they saw only wreckage all the way out to the horizon. The Baptist church across the street was only recognizable from the two church vans that still stood next to a basement wall. Imagine if such a storm hit our town and leveled our homes and St. John's sanctuary and facilities. Or think about what it must be like to be a Christian in a country where you can't drive down the road and see two, ten, or even twenty congregations that offer regular worship services; instead, you have to gather secretly with other believers at whatever time you can because the government and the population-at-large persecutes the Church. That's the kind of situation and suffering that the first hearers of Peter's message from today's epistle reading would have known. They did not know the freedom and luxury to which we as Christians in this time and place all too easily become accustomed.

Our priorities get out of joint. Our time is not our own. Our lives are not our own. But we stubbornly fight against that truth, tricking ourselves into thinking that we could have something – anything – other than our relationship with our Creator as our primary priority in this life. We say that we only have so much time, that we have other commitments, that we have *things to do*, but these are all choices that we make, or consequences of choices we have made. We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day. If something is important, if something really matters to you, you have the ability to reconsider how you use those twenty-four hours. But why, then, should your relationship with God be the top priority in your life? Why does that matter in a world where persecution may come and storms

destroy? Why should you entrust yourself to God in your thinking, your relationships, your scheduling, your living? **What does Jesus, who reveals God's heart to us, have to say about our Father's priorities?**

Take a look at today's Gospel text from John 17. Here we have a portion of John's recording of what we know as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer." It's called that because Jesus is praying for his disciples, all those people whom the Father has entrusted to His Son's care and keeping. Jesus isn't just praying for those disciples who were gathered there with him in that time right before his sacrificial death on the cross: farther on in his prayer (John 17:20), we hear that Jesus is praying for us, too, and for all those who would hear the Good News through those early disciples. Jesus is the one who bridges the gap between God and man, because he alone is both. He alone is qualified and able to be the high priest that we self-centered and priority-challenged people need to represent us before an infinite and holy God. Recognizing that the Father has entrusted us to Jesus' care, we can get a clearer picture of how God works. We can better understand Who He is and what His priorities really are.

The phrase that Jesus uses in his prayer, "**knowing God,**" isn't just some throwaway expression that we should take lightly – this is hugely important! And while it might be translated a couple of ways in English, the original word used in the original Greek of the New Testament points us to something much deeper than having a passing acquaintance or casual familiarity. When Jesus is speaking of knowing God, he's referring to a connected relationship. It's a little like the bond formed after years of marriage, or that shared by lifelong friends, where you come to understand each other. Jesus is praying for you and me to come to know his Father in the profound and lasting way He is known by His Son. **God wants to be reconciled with you**, with all those people that He has entrusted to Jesus' care and keeping.

God's purpose for being born into human flesh, for all the work that Jesus did while on earth, was nothing less than that total reconciliation of God and man, bridging that separation that came about as a result of our sin and our out-of-joint priorities. God has come into our world, giving His Son to fix our relationship, bringing into our lives the forgiveness that we so desperately need. He has come to reunite us with Himself. Jesus steps in to bridge the gap because **God has made you His priority.**

The Father has entrusted us to Jesus, His Son. And what does that mean? We have a God who is with us, who is *for* us. Jesus spent his time with the disciples pointing them to the Father, sharing with them all the words that God had given him. Jesus shows us God the Father in His love for His creation. He called the disciples out of the world, even as he calls you and me out of the world, but he doesn't leave us to our own devices. We remember on Pentecost that God has not left us alone but given His Holy Spirit to the Church, to strengthen and encourage us in this time while we wait for Christ's return. This is especially important for us in a world where persecution may come and storms destroy, for we can take great comfort in knowing that we have a God who has given Himself for us, for you and for me. **You are God's priority.**

Because you are God's priority, because you have been entrusted to Jesus' keeping, **you can in turn entrust your time, energy, and life to God.** Allow Him to guide your choices and live as his people in the world. Understanding that the time given into your care comes from God, consider how you can use each twenty-four hour day to live as His people in the world, even in the face of suffering or storms. Don't "fit God into your schedule;" rather, orient your life around your relationship with Him. Don't take your worship life for granted as a consumer, but consider the astounding truth that your God wants to spend time with you. Everything that you are, everything that you have, everything that you do can be founded in His never-failing love for you as revealed in Jesus.

As we come into summer, whether you worship here at St. John's on Saturday or Sunday, or if you worship with other Christians as you travel for work or vacation around this nation or the world, always remember that you are spending time with our God Who has made *you* His priority. Entrust your soul to Him, **for you are His.**

Amen.