

Kept in the Name

7th Sun. of Easter – 05/ 20/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 17:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 11, [Jesus prays for all believers as He heads to the cross,] **“Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ What’s it feel like to know that Jesus is praying for you, dear friends; that He was praying for you some 2000 years ago as He knelt before the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane and prepared to suffer and die the very next day?

→ Ever since Jesus established the body of all those who believe in and confess His name as Savior, into the one “Holy Christian Church”, we Christians throughout the centuries have rejoiced, just as we did a few nights ago at our Ascension Day service, that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, as our victorious Lord and King over all, yes; but we are also both overwhelmed and overjoyed that He is right now interceding to keep His chosen people, protected and eternally in the name of the one true and Triune God!

✘ An “intercessor” is one who represents; who speaks out on behalf of another person; pleading someone else’s case to a higher authority; seeking to bring about a solution or resolution in a contentious situation that is in the best interest of the one for whom he/she is interceding.

→ It is always comforting to know that someone cares enough to intercede for you. A litigant, for example, should be confident in the lawyer’s capability to speak what needs to be said in court. He only needs to sit and let the professional; the one equipped with the necessary information, say the right words so that justice will be accomplished.

→ Well, as Christians, you and I find comfort in the fact that we have the preeminent intercessor; the promised Messiah of God, who daily makes appeals for us on high. Yes, you can be certain that the heavenly Father; the eternal Judge over all, hears His only begotten and beloved Son intercede and speak in your favor!

→ And Jesus’ plea for you and me is the very same as we heard Him pray in verse 11 from the Garden of Gethsemane, “Holy Father, keep them in Your name”; the one and only name of Yahweh; the name that guarantees our eternal protection against an evil world; a world so completely influenced by the evil one and all of his evil tricks and demons who want to pull us all away from salvation and into the eternal fires of hell and condemnation.

I. Kept in His name by Jesus’ intercession

✘ Yes, you and I are “kept in [the Father’s] name” by means of our Lord’s intercession for us. Romans 8:34 assures us, “Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

That verb in the original Greek is a present tense verb that is meant to convey not only a current activity taking place, but a continuous, ongoing, every-moment-of-every-day activity that will never end!

→ And boy, that's a great comfort, isn't it? Because you need the Lord's intercession just as I do something fierce, right? Why? As if it's not obvious that the world is waging war against you and your unity with your Father.

- ✘ That's also a present tense, ongoing action being waged against us and all who believe in and confess Jesus as our God and Savior. Ephesians 6:12 clearly says that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

→ These are deadly powers intent on using whatever lie or power it takes to destroy our unity with the Father and the Son; to lead you and me to abandon His name, His Word, and His work. One of Satan's first and favorite weapons is that of doubt. "If God really loves you, then why would He make you face all of these problems"; "why would He give you these confusing concerns and thoughts"; "why would He make you deal with this disease or that grief"?

→ But of course Satan hides the fact that the troubles and griefs and trials that we face here on earth do not come from God, but from Satan himself, and as Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19ff, they come from our own sin-filled hearts and desires as well.

- ✘ That's one of the biggest reasons that you and I so desperately need Jesus interceding for us every day, because honestly, we just blow it big so often in our relationship with God because of our willingness; our desire to entertain the world's temptations and traps to the point that it looks like you and I are still one with this evil world much of the time.

→ As Jesus says in verse eight, He has given us His powerful and protective Word to guide us and help us fight against Satan and the world. The problem is, we just don't tap into it as God intends. Instead our Bibles sit closed on the shelf or unopen in our phones six or seven days out of the week. Oh, it's good that we look at and listen to His Word here at church, but we need to live in His truth every day, not just 1/7 of the time.

→ It's not like the devil says, "Oh you know, that guy Fred, or that girl Sally – they go to Bible Study on Sunday, so you know, we'll just let up on them the rest of the week." No way! It's exactly the opposite. The closer and closer you get to Jesus, the more and more the evil forces will work on, and attack you. Which means the more and more you and I need Jesus as our "advocate with the Father" as 1 John 2:1 says He is. Yes, the more and more we need to tap into the protective gifts and powerful defenses that God freely gives to us.

- ✘ Friends, we are not capable of fighting-off these powers on our own. We stand speechless before the Father because of our utter and complete guilt and sin-weakened nature.

→ But Jesus does not stand speechless. Hebrews 7:25 says that “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”; that is, for us!

→ Yes, this is the importance of Jesus’ ascension; of His place on the throne at the right hand of the Father. Jesus sits where only He can sit as the perfect and sinless and victorious Lamb of God, right in the middle of the realms of glory. Hebrews 9:24 says, “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

✘ That’s why Jesus is there, not for Himself – He already has equality with the Father. He’s there for you, and you and me. He’s there, moving the very heart of God, because of Jesus words and prayers and saving work to keep you as one with Him, “even as [He and Jesus] are one” (v. 11).

→ This Word from Holy Scripture gives you the confidence that Jesus’ Word to the Father on your behalf is actually His Father’s own Word. In verse seven Jesus said as much when He said, “Now [believers] know that everything that You have given Me” – that is all of Jesus’ teaching and work – “is from You.”

II. Kept in His Name Because We are Christ’s

✘ You see, it’s all about the Father’s great love and His generous heart for us all. He didn’t have to do it. You and I certainly didn’t deserve it – quite the opposite, but still in verse two Jesus says that the Father gave Him “authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom” the Father has given to Jesus in faith.

→ This is the glorious confidence you and I have; that we are “kept in God’s name”, because His love and generosity and salvation plan for your soul and mine has been in place since before the Creation of the world.

✘ And Jesus’ plea on our behalf is heard and recorded for us from the cross, “Father, forgive them” (Lk. 23:34). And here in verse one, “Father...glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.”

→ Just think of what Jesus is praying there in the Garden. He’s basically crying out in anguish, “Father, put Me on the cross. Burden and bury Me with all people’s sin. Raise Me from the dead for these, Your beloved people.” All of this suffering and anguish and death; this is what glorifies Jesus. His saving work for you...for me.

→ And how did the Father reply to Jesus? He heard His plea and it pleased Him so much that He forgave His people; He forgave you and me as verse four says, by the “accomplished” work that only Jesus was able to accomplish for our eternal life.

✘ Now, with Jesus at the Father’s right hand, praying for you continually, friends, you have eternal life guaranteed. “And this is eternal life,” verse three says, “that they know You (Father) ... and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (v 3).

→ Yes, because you know the Father and His Son, Jesus as the Savior of your souls, I can say to you confidently that, since you have been given to Jesus and since

you are surrounded by the Father's great name, "your sins are forgiven". You are in the name of the Father and of † the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

➔ Now with the joy of that assurance, how do you respond? You run into His protecting name in His Word. With His name upon you and in you, you are equipped to more readily and quickly recognize the evil attacks that try to divide you from your Father, and you douse them with a flood of His saving Word; the same flood that placed His name upon you in the first place; the drowning power at work in your baptism; the power that gives you new, vibrant life every day!

➔ For those of you who understand computers, think of your baptism and God's name upon you like a Computer Antivirus program that immediately recognizes the name and the threat of any and all evil attempts against you and has the power to neutralize them all.

✘ It's His name; it's the fact that you are in His name and kept that way by Jesus' presence and prayers and pleas on your behalf because of His shed body and blood, that gives you the power that you need for this Christian life.

Conclusion

✘ Not all intercessors have the same ability to deliver in a courtroom. There are good lawyers, many not so good lawyers and some who are just plain inept. But your intercessor; the risen and enthroned Son of God never fails. His High Priestly prayer from Gethsemane was heard, just as His words on your behalf are still heard by the Father every day.

➔ And through His prayers, and by the power of His gifts of Word and Sacrament and grace and saving faith, He keeps you in God's name until the day when He comes to bring you into His eternal glory. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* Amen.