

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island Maryland, 7th Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018.

When we think of Jesus and prayer, we think first of the Lord's Prayer. It's a prayer that Jesus teaches us. He wants to help us. He wants to show us the way. In Luke's Gospel, one of the disciples says to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." And Jesus does so. "When you pray, say the following." And we do so, regularly: "Our Father, who art in heaven ..." Jesus is our teacher. We are his students.

In today's Gospel (**John 17:6-19**), however, we see Jesus in a very different mode. He is not teaching the disciples. He is praying for them. From the 17th chapter of John: "Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying '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.'" Here, Jesus is not a teacher; he is an Advocate. And we are those for whom Jesus is advocating.

Both roles – teacher and advocate – are important. We love a good teacher, and Jesus was certainly that. But we also love a good guardian, someone who looks after us, someone who argues on our behalf, someone who goes to the mat for us, or, in the case of Jesus, goes to the Cross for us.

One of the persons you and I often use as a reference is a teacher. A teacher knows us pretty well. A teacher knows our strengths and our weaknesses. Teachers sometimes know our potential better than we do. We value teachers as references. Indeed, we value anyone who goes to bat for us.

In the case of the disciples, Jesus serves as a reference without being asked. He knows the disciples well. He is a master teacher after all. And in today's passage, he offers God an unsolicited endorsement of the disciples, with the exception of Judas. "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one."

And Jesus uses a little leverage in his conversation with the Father. "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." This is a version, albeit a mild one, of "You owe me one." "You asked me to care for these people and I have done so. Now I am asking you to care for them."

And not just the twelve disciples, including Matthias, a replacement for Judas, but for you and me centuries later (**Acts 1:15-1, 21-26**). Had Jesus not risen from the dead, had he not been granted new life, had his work not been sustained through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't have Jesus as a reference. One doesn't ask a dead person for a reference. One asks a living person for a reference. And not just any living person, but the Son of God. From our second lesson this morning (**I John 5:9-13**): "If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater."

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, put this sentiment in the form of a question: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" In other words, whom better to ask as a reference, as an advocate, as a savior, than the Son of God?

The gospel lesson lists two ambitious pleas of Jesus to his Father on our behalf: "protect them from the evil one" and "sanctify them in the truth." The two goals are sides of the same coin. "Father, keep them safe from harm, and also keep them focused on what is holy."

Can you imagine our situation if God didn't care about our welfare? What if we didn't have an Advocate in Jesus? We get into enough trouble with an Advocate. Without one, life would be unbearable. Many of those who take their own life do so because they feel that no one cares.

Well, as Christian people, we believe that God does care, and expresses that protection and sanctification in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. That's why we give thanks. That's why we gather. That's why we share. That's why we care.

We don't take God's care for granted. Jesus earned that care for us. He died for us. And God raised him from the dead for us. As Jesus prayed for his disciples, the Risen Christ prays for you and me. From an earlier passage from the First Epistle of John, there are these familiar words: "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous."

And, you know who else is our Advocate? That would be Mom. That would be one who protects and serves in ways known and unknown. Perhaps not in every

case, but in the great majority of cases, we have Mom on our side. So, it is only right, only fair, that we set aside one day a year to honor mothers. If we had special shirts for this day for our mothers, they might read “Don’t mess with my kid!”

As mothers look out for their children, so Jesus looks out for his disciples and for you and me. And sometimes the advocacy of our mothers blends with the advocacy of Jesus.

Think of Mary, the mother. She was there for Jesus from his conception to his crucifixion to his resurrection. Thirty-three years she cared for him. And given his behavior at different stages of his life, caring for him was no easy task. How many times did she have to defend him against mean things people were saying about him? I’m sure there were occasions when she questioned his judgment and took him aside to ask, “Are you sure you want to do this? Forty days in the wilderness? Healing on the Sabbath? Overturning tables in the Temple? A last supper? Son, are you sure?”

And, when Jesus said, “Yes, it is something I have to do,” she took a deep breath and said a prayer for her son. A prayer that probably sounded like “Dear Lord, protect him from the evil one, and sanctify him in the truth.” You see, Mary had shirts other than “Don’t mess with my kid,” one of which read, in the words of this morning’s Collect, “Do not leave him comfortless.”

And, you know what? God did not leave Jesus comfortless. He raised him from the dead. That’s Advocacy in the extreme. And, you know what else? That same Advocacy is available to you and me. It’s probably going on this very moment. What a blessing God is, and Jesus is, and Mom is. Thanks be to all of them.

Amen.