

There is a palpable sense of God's presence all around us as we experienced the gracious rain of last night, the fog early this morning, and the brilliant sunshine and blue sky that reveal a riot of chartreuse, pink, red, and yellow hues of foliage. God is present at all times and in all places, the question is do we have eyes to see? Have we adjusted our listening to perceive Jesus' voice? I am particularly excited today that my son, Caleb, will be confirmed at a service at St. Margaret's Church in Belfast this afternoon. Caleb through the sacrament of Confirmation is cementing his willingness to lean into the promptings of the Spirit and seek God's help in living the baptismal life as a young adult.

Part of saying "yes" to all God desires for us is that we know Jesus is praying for us—which brings us to the Gospel lesson. These windows next to the pulpit reflect the Gospel reading appointed for today (actually the past several Sundays). It is Thursday evening, the night on which Jesus will be betrayed, handed over to his enemies, deserted by his friends, tried, convicted, and ultimately crucified. And knowing all that is to come, he gathers his closest friends, offers them parting words of encouragement and hope, and then prays for them. We know this as part of the great "high priestly prayer" in John's Gospel. Jesus prays that the disciples may endure the challenges that come their way. He prays that they may discover strength in their unity. He prays that they will be drawn together as one as Jesus and the heavenly Father are one. And he prays not only for them, but for all who *will believe* because of their testimony.

And that's where we come in. We are here this morning, in church, because someone told us about Jesus. Whether it was a parent, friend, grandparent, or priest. Someone told us about the good news that in Jesus we see that God loves us all, and inspired by this promise and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we came to believe.

And someone told the person who told us. And someone else told that person. And someone told that person as well... all the way back to the testimony of these disciples who, despite their fear – both this evening and on Easter morning – nevertheless moved out of the closed room into the promise of resurrection and began to share the good news of Jesus with others.

When Jesus prays not only for these disciples but for those who believe because of them, he's praying for John's original audience and for all Christians ever since, all the way up to you and me.

All too often, Scripture can seem like a story told about people living such a long time ago that we may wonder what it has to say to us today. But in a few passages – especially in John's Gospel – there are what I think of as little doors that open up to invite us into the story itself to be active participants in the ongoing drama of God's love for all the world. We got one of those doors a few weeks ago when Jesus, in his encounter with Thomas, blessed all those who believed in Jesus even though they/we hadn't seen him. That included John's community and us. Today, we get another, as we hear Jesus on this significant night take time to pray for us.

I wonder what difference that might make to you this week? As we struggle with challenges at work, home or school; as we deal with set backs in our professional or personal lives; or as we deal with stress and illness;...I want you to know that whatever you may face, *you do not face it alone*, because Jesus was praying for you back then and promises to accompany us through the Holy Spirit today.

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for us. Jesus continues to walk with us. And Jesus will accompany us through all that may come, holding onto us through the highs and lows of this life, even through death to new life. This is the promise of resurrection.

*Risen and Ascended Lord, you have promised to be with us always; teach us to be aware of your presence, and to abide in your love, that we may walk in the way that leads to glory, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.*

*The Seventh Sunday of Easter, 21 May 2023  
St. Thomas' Church, Camden  
The Rev. Paul Briggs*