

Easter 7 – May 12, 2024
Text: John 17:11b-19
Theme: You Have the Father in Your Corner

We celebrate seven Sundays of Easter, and today is the seventh. These 49 days are one giant celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The music is joyful. The readings are exciting and full of hope. The whole season is a mountaintop experience for Christians all over the world as they celebrate that Christ the Lord is risen and will never die again.

Having said all of that and certainly rejoiced greatly, we are still stuck in the reality of living in a sin fallen, broken world. I talk to people almost every week who are suffering in some way or another. Some feel as though God is not real or that the Church is not truly representing God. Some are just looking for money or food. Some are looking for an answer to why they are suffering. Some are struggling with relationships with loved ones or the loss of a loved one. Some just want someone to listen to them without judgement. It is a rare occasion that I can fix whatever it is that is causing their suffering.

It took me a long time to understand that I was not called to fix people's problems. I am not a doctor, a financial counselor, a lawyer, or a therapist. Like all new pastors, I wanted to fix everyone's problems, but there is simply not enough time in the day

to do it, and no one person has enough expertise or energy to do it. It is impossible. Once I understood that fixing people's problems was impossible, then I could ask the question, "what then am I supposed to do?" I could just listen and that is helpful to a point, but eventually people want some answers. You can't just nod sympathetically forever. No, I needed something I could do that tied in with my training. One day as I was struggling with this question, I came across our Gospel text for today. It really is amazing the way the Holy Spirit lays the Word of God open before you if you ask. So many times, I hear people complaining that God is not speaking to them but, one, they never open the Bible which is where He promises to speak, two, they never ask Him the specific question, and three, they don't want to hear anything with which they disagree and God is going to speak the truth whether we like it or not.

In the Gospel, Jesus is speaking with God the Father. He is about to be crucified and He knows that shortly after He rises from the dead, He will ascend into Heaven. So, He is praying for His followers. Jesus recognizes that He has made us aliens in the world. We are still in the world but we are not of the world and this is going to make the world hate us. We do not play by their rules. We are not subject to their desires. We stay out of their filth and all that makes

the world hates us and resent us. That is just a fact about which we can do nothing. We are who we are and we don't want to be anything else, but that does not make it easy. Satan deliberately attacks us on all fronts. He attacks us physically, spiritually, and mentally. Sometimes he uses his minions and sometimes he supernaturally places hardships in our path. You have heard me say many times that because the Holy Spirit entered us in baptism and made us children of God, the Devil cannot touch us. That is true. Our souls are safe in the hands of God. But Satan will do everything he can to get us to reject God. That is his only hope. If we are broke, he will whisper in our ears that it is God's fault and that He doesn't really love us or we wouldn't be broke. If we are sick, he will try to convince us that God doesn't care. If we are hurting, he will try to get us to believe that it is somehow God's fault. But listen to what Jesus says in His prayer to our Father.

"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." Jesus knows that we have to be in the world because we have work to do. It is our calling to tell others about Jesus. But He also knows that it will be hard for us because this world belongs to Satan. We are behind enemy lines and he will try to stop us from succeeding in our calling, so Jesus calls in reinforcements. He calls in our Father. "Keep them from the evil

one." Satan cannot have us. God the Father Almighty has been called in to protect us from Satan. Whatever suffering we endure, whatever grief we bear, whatever pain we have, Satan cannot have us and God the Father Almighty stands beside us. We win. End of story. That is the true joy of Easter encapsulated in the Gospel for today. We win.

St. John, in his epistle to the congregations he served says this,

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." We know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. We already have everything good that we need and we will receive whatever else we need that is good when we need it. We can have absolute confidence in the one who rose from the dead for us and sent His Holy Spirit to watch over us until we receive our final reward in paradise with Him. That is the joy of Easter.