



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
SPARTANBURG

this way forward

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JESUS: DEAR GOD...JUST PLEASE

John 17:6-19

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Prayer is powerful...

...and when it comes from someone you love, that loves you, it takes on a whole other level of meaning and experience.

To have someone lay hands upon you and pray for your protection, gives you a sense of connection to that person; you hear their deep love in the timbre of their voice; and it connects you to the power of God up above.

So, to have that same prayer of protection come from the Son of God himself, is to get a sense of an inevitable destiny. Imagine, Jesus himself praying for you.

When the book of John was written, around A.D. 100, the Roman government had already begun murdering Christians. John's audience were among the persecuted, so they would have heard our passage with special attention. To believe that Jesus would go to the trouble, to pray to God for his own, would have girded them for the task ahead.

Today, we come in prayer for our high school seniors, as Jesus came in prayer for his disciples. We will find his prayer to God an excellent road map for our care for them. We pray for their sanctification and their protection.

We pray for protection

Jesus had special attention paid to him by God in heaven; special protection, special care. When Jesus was an infant, God misled Herod's murderous minions and told Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt with his family. Later, when Jesus was threatened by a mob, I believe it was God who quieted their hearts and allowed Jesus to walk away. When Jesus was thirsty and tired in the desert, God sent angels to tend and care for him.

Jesus wants the disciples cared for in the same way he received loving care; and he is calling in a

chip, from the Lord God of heaven and earth, for this purpose.

Just last week I heard a remarkable story about a college student stuck on the roadside. She was taking a bus from Atlanta to Charlotte. It was stuck for hours, but she needed to get back. I think it was for a test. Her parents lived in a different part of the country and, so, could not help. But she was a part of the Presbyterian campus ministry and had been paired with a church family. She called them and explained everything. Without missing a beat, they told her to find a safe place to wait. They hopped in their car and brought her back. As a parent, it is a tremendous relief knowing you have people watching out for your kids.

In our text this morning, Jesus asked God to take that role! Jesus wanted God to especially watch over them, since he will no longer have this direct role.

Jesus takes the time to ask God's providence to watch over them, because he knows what the disciples are going to face.

They, too, will be rejected by their friends. They will work very hard for the cause, traveling from town to town, relying on the kindness of strangers – and have their lives threatened many times over. They will need God's special care.

We know our young men and women will also face hardships and dangers. The world is a treacherous place and all the young lives claimed by the opioid epidemic, car crashes, and other tragedies screams this in spades!

Sometimes we are tempted to put them back in that playpen, to make sure no harm comes to them!

We know life is hard, even if nothing is going wrong! At times, it will seem impossibly hard,

whether it is in relationships or just a hard day at work, dealing with a difficult boss or trying to make ends meet. We pray, as Jesus did, for God's powerful hand to keep them from evil and from danger.

It is daunting to set someone free, it was even daunting for Jesus, but knowing that we have been imperfect parents and an imperfect church makes it that much worse...

...so we especially pray most of all,

"God, please don't let them make the same boneheaded mistakes we did!"

"Dear God, don't let them skip all their classes freshman year!"

"Dear God, don't let them move across the country on a whim with no plan!"

"Dear God, Dear God, Dear God!...just please!"

But we know God will only do so much in this regard. God won't put them, or us, in the proverbial playpen of protection.

Even as Jesus prayed for protection upon his disciples, he did not ask for an easy life for them. He prays, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world but I ask you to protect them from the evil one."

Jesus knows that to live a life of complete safety, in a plastic bubble so to speak, is to live no life at all. God did not remove all danger from Jesus nor the disciples.

But the modern child has been overly protected. Actions that were perfectly normal in the 1970's, i.e. 3rd graders walking to school alone, now seem irresponsible. Britain swung from 80% of third graders walking to school to only 9% in 1990!

Did you know, that in the aftermath of WWII, England built playgrounds, as one person wrote, "with a 'free and permissive atmosphere' with as little adult supervision as possible"? The idea was that kids should face, what to them seem like, "really dangerous risks" and then conquer them alone. That, she said, "is what builds self-confidence and courage." By the way, this included starting random fires with available trash! But the

design was purposeful, as an article described, "Children who might grow up to fight wars were not shielded from danger; they were expected to meet it with assertiveness and even bravado."

This certainly seemed to be Jesus' approach. So, as hard as it is, we don't pray that God will prevent any temptation or danger from coming their way. Instead, as a church, we pray that all the Sunday schools, mission trips, worship services, and youth events have helped build these young men and women into people of strong faith, centered in God. That's our real pray for all of you seniors.

And we pray that we have done our part well.

When Jesus faced hard times, he was tempted to use his power in inappropriate ways. But he didn't. Tempted, but without sin, the Bible tells us. He did not leap from a building to convince people of his divinity. He did not force people to come to his cause through mind control or violence. His victory would not come by mowing down his opponents or by seeking his goal at any cost. His victory, in a world of violence, treachery, and authoritarianism would come by the uncompromising principles of peace, forgiveness, and love.

He confronted many difficult challenges. And he did so knowing God the Father was by his side and knowing that however hard things became, he would be victorious by staying on the right path.

We pray these young men and women, when they face hardships, will not compromise their faith. We know they will face temptations to cut corners in school or work life, tempted to compromise values for short term gain. We have all been there.

But we do pray they will feel God at their side when they face trials, giving them the same confidence in ultimate victory through Christ our Lord.

Knowing God will not simply remove all dangers, trials, or temptation, we pray that when they do confront them, in the manner of The Lord's

Prayer: Deliver them from evil. Deliver them through any trials they face and make them stronger and more reliant in your love and more convinced of your purposes.

We know that you will sometimes fail in this. I have, your parents have, everyone has. So, when you do, look to God for his forgiveness and forgive yourself. Don't expect perfection; receive God's grace when it is offered.

But Jesus did more than pray for protection, he prayed for their purposes and so do we.

We pray for sanctification

Jesus sets apart his disciples to continue his work. He prays, "Sanctify them in the truth." To be sanctified is to be set apart for a holy task – the task of spreading Jesus' message.

Today, we pray for our high school seniors to be set apart, so they might live into God's purposes for their lives.

They will go onto something new. Whether it is work or school, they are graduating into a new maturity.

We hope that whatever their personal goals, in terms of careers or families, that deep in their hearts they would all share the goal of continuing to grow into people of loving service to God.

We know this world needs fixing and we don't even need to go far to find it. For example, the poverty rate for children in Spartanburg is over 40%! Almost double that of Greenville! This is an awful statistic, but what it means for an individual's life is heartbreaking.

We pray not only that God uses us powerfully, to combat such horrors, but that God will lay upon these young people's hearts an extra measure of conviction, compassion, and wisdom that the world seems to lack.

We pray God will give to this generation a heart and a soul for those most precious to God, that my generation lacks or the generation before me!

Just as Jesus no longer called his disciples servants but friends, we no longer only call you our children but we call you partners. Partners in service to God, calling them to be his hope in this, alongside of us.

This was Jesus' hope for his disciples and our hope for every single one us. Amen.