

**Here's a question for any of our women who have been mothers. Do you remember your favorite gift that you ever got at a baby shower?**

A woman named Louise Cramer tells the story of opening gifts at the shower for her first child. Among all the necessities and toys, Louise found one very special gift. **It was a baby quilt hand-sewn by her grandmother, who had passed away years before.** As Louise marveled over the beauty of the quilt, it hit her that her grandmother had planned this quilt, and spent weeks stitching it together, long before Louise ever got pregnant. Louise writes, *"She probably knew as she patiently stitched it that she would never meet the child for whom she was sewing."* Motivated by love and faithfulness, Louise's grandmother planned this very special gift for a future great-grandchild she would never see.

**I thought of this very special gift when I read our scripture passage today.** WHY? Because this passage relates Jesus' last major prayer before his arrest and crucifixion. **Our lesson from John's gospel is often referred to as the "real" Lord's Prayer.** It is the one in which Jesus prayed for his friends, the apostles.

Jesus knew that his ministry and his life were both drawing to a close. He had already submitted himself to the Father's will. He knew that his arrest and trial and very public, very humiliating, very violent death would throw his apostles into a turmoil. Put yourself in the place of Jesus' friends. **Imagine seeing Jesus' arrest and torture and death through their eyes.** Wouldn't you be overwhelmed by grief and fear and questions and doubts? I know I would be.

**AND SO . . .** Jesus did a miracle to save his own life and ministry. Nope. Jesus appeared to his apostles with a host of angels around him so that they would never again doubt his divine nature. Again, NO! Jesus worked a miracle and took his apostles with him to heaven so that they wouldn't have to suffer in any way because of their faith in him. ABSOLUTELY NO!!!

**Jesus could have done all those things—BUT HE DIDN'T.** They were all within his power. But they weren't God's will for him or for his followers. Instead he aligns himself and us up with God through the gift of Prayer. That's one of the primary purposes of PRAYER... to develop a loving, trusting relationship between us and God.

And so . . . Jesus, in his last hours on this earth, did what he had always done throughout his ministry. **He took his concerns to his loving Father in prayer.**

**Jesus prayed for others.** He prayed for his disciples, and then he prayed for all those people he had never met, people who hadn't even been born yet, generations of people yet to be born who would come to believe in him as their Lord and Savior. **In other words, in his last hours on earth, Jesus prayed for you and me. What an incredible gift of love!**

There is a true story that Admiral William McRaven of the U.S. Special Forces Operation Command tells of his training as a Navy SEAL. One technique that the SEALs practice regularly according to Admiral McRaven is how to perform underwater attacks against enemy ships. It is a grueling and risky operation. Two SEAL divers are dropped off at night at least two miles away from an enemy harbor. With only a depth gauge and a compass, the two divers must swim at least two miles underwater in the dark to reach the enemy ship.

But this isn't the hardest part of the mission. The hardest part of the mission is when the divers have to dive below the ship to the very center of its hull. Underneath the huge steel ships, there is no light whatsoever. The divers must complete the rest of the mission in total darkness. It is only because they prepare so thoroughly beforehand that they are able to operate with total skill and composure in the dark.

Admiral McRaven concludes his story by saying, *"If you want to change the world, you must be your very best in the darkest moment."*

Our Bible passage today shows that Jesus was at his very best in his darkest moment. He was calm, confident in his Father's love and his Father's plans for him. In fact, he was so confident that Jesus barely felt the need to pray for himself. Instead, he prayed for his apostles who would be left behind to do his work. He knew that they were weak, scared and unprepared—just as we would be weak, scared and unprepared under similar circumstances. **And that is exactly why prayer is the first and best cure for dealing with our own dark moments.**

Author and Nobel Prize winner Alice Munro wrote that her mother prayed on her knees every morning, afternoon and night. She began each morning with prayers to be open to God's will. She ended each day with prayers for God to examine her thoughts, actions and words that day. **Munro claims that one benefit of faithful prayer is that "... nothing can happen to you that you can't make use of.** Even if you're racked by troubles, and sick and poor and ugly, you've got your soul to carry through life like a treasure on a platter."

Think about that for a second. When you maintain regular, faithful communication with God, God will reveal to you a wisdom that says: **"nothing can happen that you can't make use of."** Even suffering and sorrow and fear and doubts. God's wisdom and perspective will allow you to make use of your worst moments. Just as Jesus did in our Bible passage for today.

So, imagine once again that you are one of Jesus' friends, the disciples. In their presence Jesus prayed, thanking God for them and praying for their well-being. **Jesus' prayer was startling, breath-taking.** Having learned so much from Jesus as they traveled with him for the better part of three years, perhaps what stuck with the disciples most was how he prayed. At one point they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray like he did. And **you will recall that Jesus taught them a model prayer that we know today as the Lord's Prayer.** But in that day before his crucifixion, Christ prayed for his friends. It is always reassuring when we are going through difficult times to know that someone else is praying for us.

Pastor Bill Hybels tells about an interesting experience after a baptism service in their church. He stepped into the church stairwell to find a woman there crying. The woman admitted to Hybels that she was struggling. It was her own mother who had just been baptized. So why the tears? Because, the woman confessed, **"I prayed for her every day for almost 20 years. The reason I'm crying is because I came this close to giving up on her."** After 15 years of praying daily for her mother, the woman asked herself, "Why am I wasting my breath?" At the 19-year mark, she considered giving up. The woman admitted that her faith was weak, that she wanted to give up on her mother meeting Christ and making a commitment to him. **But after 20 years of daily prayers—unanswered prayers that mocked the woman's faith and caused her much frustration—after 20 years of faithfulness in spite of her weakness and her doubts, this woman's mother finally received Jesus as her Lord and Savior.**

**We sometimes forget how powerful a simple prayer can be. Do you pray for your friends?** Jesus did. And you know what? In the same way that Jesus prayed for the apostles, he prays for us. In times of confusion, when we are unsure of what to do next, it is a great comfort to know that Jesus is praying for us.

**But how did he pray? What did he ask for? Jesus prayed that God would help his friends remain strong.** That's always an appropriate prayer—**THE PRAYER FOR STRENGTH.**

Pastor E. Stanley Jones once told about two men praying. One prayed, "Lord, please help me to hold on." The other prayed, "Lord, please help me to let go."

Have you prayed either of these prayers lately? I think we can all relate to them. Each one requires a different kind of strength.

Ellen Peach writes, "There are two types of strength. There is the strength of the wind that sways the mighty oak, and there is the strength of the oak that withstands the power of the wind. There is the strength of the locomotive that pulls the heavy train across the bridge, and there is the strength of the bridge that holds up the weight of the train. **One is active strength, the other is passive strength.** One is the power to keep going, the

other is the power to keep still. One is the strength by which we overcome; the other is the strength by which we endure.”

Jesus’ prayer is a great reminder to us that God never intended us to suffer and struggle through life under our own strength. We have limited strength, limited wisdom, and limited perspective. Our circumstances sometimes look more powerful than God’s love for us. Through prayer, God wants to restore our strength, deepen our wisdom, and elevate our perspective.

Jesus knew the cost of being one of his followers in those early days would be high. He knew there would be times when his disciples’ lives would be in danger. He knew there would be times when they would be tempted to run. Notice that Jesus didn’t pray that they would be released from their problems. **Instead, he prayed for them to be strong—strong enough to withstand the challenges that lay ahead.** Jesus did not pray for escape but victory. He prayed, *“I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.”*

**The one prayer that God always answers is a prayer for the strength to endure.** Jesus prayed for the apostles so that they would find strength during their times of suffering. That was a prayer that was answered time and time again. It’s a prayer that some of us have prayed as well. God is faithful. He will not forget us in our time of need.

**Jesus prayed for his friends. He prayed that they would be strong. He also prayed that they would be united.** *“Protect them in your name that you have given me,”* he prayed, *“so that they may be one, as we are one.”* That is such an important message for us. **We are not simply a collection of individuals. We are the body of Christ.** It is so vitally important that we in the church pull together, that we are united.

**Too many things can disrupt the unity of a church.** People get upset with the decisions of a board. Or people get upset with the pastor. Jesus knew that it is not easy to maintain unity among a talented, yet sometimes cantankerous group of people. He also knew, however, that we can never accomplish the things that he has called us to accomplish if WE DO NOT PULL TOGETHER.

**UNITY DOES NOT COME EASILY.** It requires humility and a shared vision. And most of all, unity requires prayer. When we align our will with the will of God, when we align our character with the character of Jesus, then we will operate in a spirit of unity. And we can accomplish the work of Jesus on this earth if we can just learn to work together.

In 1939, Nazi Germany gave up control of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Soviet Union. Both the Nazis and the Soviets tried very hard to destroy the culture and heritage and customs of these three tiny countries. In 1989, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, the people of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia created a giant human chain across their three countries to protest their continued oppression under Soviet rule. Approximately two million people joined hands, forming a giant human chain that crossed the borders of all three countries. They called this act of protest the Baltic Chain, or the Chain of Freedom. This act of unity caught the attention of governments around the world. Within the next two years, all three Baltic states gained their independence from the Soviet Union.

Imagine the strength and joy and comfort those citizens gained from joining hands in this giant human chain in this peaceful protest for independence. What they could not do as separate countries, they could do when they became unified. Jesus knew that there is power in unity.

**Jesus is praying for us. He is asking God two things in our behalf.** First of all, **he is asking that we have “STRENGTH” for our Journey.** I don’t know about you, but that is a prayer that I need daily. And secondly, **he is praying that we will all be “UNITED.”** That is one prayer we could help answer ourselves. We could start by praying for our friends. We could also pray for our church. Finally, we could pray for ourselves, that we will truly be strong and that we will always love one another. **A pray of both Strength & Unity will ALIGN US with God’s Will and the spirit of Jesus Christ. And we can know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God will be faithful to answering that prayer until the day we meet Him face to face. Amen.**