

John 17:11b-19. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Sanctify them by the Truth

1. Protect them

2. Set them apart for God's good purpose

Christian mothers from around the country are all praying the same prayer, “*Lord, keep them safe.*” As they watch their children graduate from college, from high school, from elementary school; as they watch their children take the confirmation vows, they pray this type of prayer. The words may be a little different each time, but the prevailing thought remains the same. “*Keep them safe in your care, O Lord.*” There is trepidation in sending their ‘babies’ out into the world, there might even be the passing thought of holding them back not letting them go at all, but these mothers are reassured by those around them that their dear children will be OK. Still, there is concern, there is a heart that loves so much and so they pray, “*O holy Father, keep them safe.*” They are going out into the world, a new stage of life, new opportunities, and new challenges. “*Keep them safe.*”

On the night he was betrayed, the night before he died, Jesus prayed a prayer of similar concern. *O holy, Father protect them by the power of your name.* He prayed for his dear disciples. Still, they were very much spiritual children who had been under his care. Jesus had grown close to these men. During the last three years Jesus had cared for them and kept them safe. He had called them from obscurity to be followers of the Christ. Jesus had called ordinary, sinful men, to follow and learn from the Son of God, and all the while he had protected them from those who wanted to cause him harm because of the message he proclaimed. Jesus had guided them more than once out of physical and spiritual danger. He rescued them from their own foolish false beliefs. He had taught them the Word of truth and rescued them from the traps set by the evil

world around them and from the devil's snares. And now these dear disciples were about to face a major crossroads in their life. Jesus would soon suffer and die and not long after this he would return to the Father. The disciples would be on their own; in a way that they had never been. And so, Jesus prayed that prayer of concern. ***“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me...”***

Think of how this prayer was such a gracious and undeserved prayer. On the night before he died, his thoughts were not focused merely on himself, his suffering, but instead he was thinking about others. He was praying for his disciples - in particular. We remember rightly that these were sinful men who were far from perfect. They had disappointed Jesus in the past. They would do so again in the very near future. These were men who had a habit of letting his word pass in one ear and out the other. They were slow to understand and quick to speak in sinful pride and ignorance. One of their latest boasts and squabbles had to do with who was the greatest. On that same night, on the night Jesus celebrated the Passover, instituted the holy supper, and washed his disciples' feet, this hardheaded bunch would have the nerve to argue about who would sit at Jesus' right and who would sit on his left in this great and glorious earthly kingdom that they had dreamed up from their foolish misunderstanding. Instead of Jesus casting them aside as unteachable, unfaithful, and unreliable, he prayed for them with a heart of compassion and love. He was praying for sinful men who would deny and desert him. Jesus prayed with deep compassion and concern for those who said that they would die rather than leave him, but when trouble actually that same night they all quickly scattered. He prayed for his weak and sinful, flawed and broken, ordinary and imperfect disciples. He prayed for them. With great love and care he prayed for them.

There is great comfort in this for us. We too are sinners. We too display a tendency to let God's Word pass through one ear and out the other. We are slow to understand and listen, while far too often we are quick to speak and act in pride. We make our vows and promises to God, but we do not keep them. We promise to be faithful, to make regular use of Word and Sacrament, to live lives of faith and obedience, and we fall far short of the promises that we make. We fall far short of the faithfulness and honor that Christ our Lord deserves. Yet, how wonderful the heart of compassion and love of our Savior that we see in these words. He is concerned, so concerned for his sinful, imperfect, unfaithful disciples. In his concern for them he displays a concern for us. He was sending his disciples out into the world, to share the Word of God, to share the message of salvation, so that sinners like you and me might be rescued and delivered from the death and hell and damnation that we deserved for our sins. Instead of warranted wrath, Jesus gives us generous grace. Instead of casting us away, our LORD gathers us to himself. In his great love, Jesus sent out his apostles followed by an unbroken stream of pastors, teachers, and ministers of the Gospel one

generation after another who have gone out as vessels of his Word. On the night before he died Jesus asked the Father to make sure that they would go out with the Word of truth. That word according to God's gracious plan has been brought to us and has found us. Our God has called us out of darkness of unbelief and punishment. He has called us by the gospel, enlightened us, and sanctified us through his precious means of grace.

Sanctified – that's one of those catechism words that is valuable spiritual shorthand. It's a term, with which we are familiar; it is also a term that is worth reviewing regularly. To be sanctified means that God has set us apart and made us holy. God puts a hedge around us and says, "You are mine." We have been set apart for God's good purpose. To those who belong to him he gives us this wonderful purpose of reflecting his glory out in the world.

A picture that I use in describing sanctification to the kids in catechism and to those who take Bible information class, is that of a piece of salvage rescued from a scrap heap. As sinners we are all lost and condemned creatures, filthy in our sin, destined only to be burned up in the fire pit of hell and yet God in his mercy has snatched us up. In his love for us He has saved us and in his undeserved love he washes us clean and sets us apart, polished up with the righteousness of Christ we are set apart and put on display so that we may shine with his splendor. He does this through the power of his saving Word. Worthless sinners covered in the filth of our sin, lost in a broken world, are made holy and whole through the word of Christ; and by his grace we have been set apart for God's good purpose. In the world, but no longer *of* the world. We are of Christ. We belong to him. We are set apart by him to serve and glorify God. ***Sanctify them by the truth, your Word is Truth.***

God has given us his Word, and therefore we are called to be different, to be set apart. We know the good news of salvation and in thanksgiving we have a deep desire to live according to our God's good and gracious will. However, as the world hated Jesus and his disciples they will hate us too. For Jesus' disciples there will always be this pressure to blend back in with the world, to forget what we learned, to forsake the ways of God and of his Christ, and to instead follow along with the ways of the world. But the LORD who called the disciples and enabled them to live and share their faith, has called you and me to faith as well. With the word connected with the water of baptism you have been washed and cleansed, and that blessed gift has meaning for our daily life as the Old Self is daily drowned, and a New Creation arises each day to live for God and to his glory. You have been made children of God, heirs and citizens of the kingdom. By the power of the Spirit working through the means of grace we are united in the faith with Peter, James, and John and all the others as members of the family of God. God has put your name on us.

And this is Jesus' prayer for us, this is Jesus prayer for you. **Protect them by the power of your name.** Again, we notice that Jesus does not ask them to be taken out of the world, for what good would that be for the unbelieving world. For the sake of the world his disciples remain in this world as salt and light. He sets us apart for this good purpose: as "salt" so that this world might be a better place, and as "light" so that the hope and light of Christ that we have been given might spread and be shared with others. Disciples and children of God set apart as an overflowing of the love of God in a world starving for love and compassion. We are set apart as harbingers of grace who strengthened and built up in their faith would shine with the glory of Christ's righteousness; who would serve his good purposes. That's what God has called his servants, his children to be. Sure, the real world might be a big and scary place. But the Father hears those prayers of concerned Christian mothers, he hears those prayers of concerned Christian aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends, and he assures us that he is watching over his dearly love children. Jesus is looking out for the graduates, the confirmands, and us, and through Word and Sacrament the Spirit of God is equipping each one us for a life of service and love.

I sat in a gym at Martin Luther College on a Saturday in May, and that gym was full of people, mothers, father, friends, and family saying the same type of prayer. Not only were they praying for God to keep their loved ones safe, but there was also this hope and expectation that they would be a blessing to their new school, to their new congregation. *"Keep them safe and bless them and use them to be a blessing."* Today, I stand in a church where there are more than a few mothers and friends and family thinking the same type of thing. A son or daughter, a niece or nephew, a granddaughter or grandson, a young man, a young woman is being confirmed and so their friends and family pray: *"Lord, keep them safe from the temptations, the threats to their faith, the threats to their well-being that being a Christian in today's world might bring. Set them apart as your own, a young man, a young woman who is in this world, but is called to be different, to be set apart, to be a child of God, and instrument of his love, a bearer of his name, and possessor of God's truth. Keep them safe, O God. With confidence we ask this. With confidence we ask that you would send them out as a blessing to the world".*

What power and comfort, what peace and assurance, God gives to the hearts not only of Christian mothers, but to each and every one of us who believe. The world might hate us, the devil might try to ensnare us and pull away from God, but the Father answers the prayer of his Son as the LORD watches over his children. He will protect the young, he will protect us, he will even make his dear children shine with his glory for God has given us his Word of Truth. **Sanctify them by the truth Your Word of Truth.** Yes, it shall be so. Amen.