

**John 17:20-26; Pride Sunday; 7 Easter; June 1, 2025**

Additional texts: Acts 16:16-34; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

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Grace to you and peace from God our parent, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

I'm scared. We live in a scary time. When I went up to the UP to visit my parents and family for Easter, I brought my passport with me. No real reason, just some fear that I might be in a situation where I'll have to try to prove that I'm a US citizen. I hear of friends traveling to foreign countries, some of them who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. I fear that they won't be able to come back into our country. I'm afraid to leave the United States for concern that I'll be stopped at the border and end up being detained and not let back into our country. It is an unsettling time for LGBTQIA+ or Queer people these days. We hear constant attacks on people as things are said or laws are introduced or passed that try to declare our Queer siblings as "other" or to make it sound like there is something wrong with them.

I also know others are scared. The queer community aren't the only ones being attacked and put down. I know my Black, Indigenous, and People of Color community have been attacked for centuries in various ways. Our siblings of hispanic heritage are facing struggles and threats as well. Asian and Pacific Islanders as well. Immigrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, including the young men in our parish house. There are a lot of people who are apprehensive and concerned now - and for many this

is just a continuation of decades or centuries of being treated like “others” and that they don’t really belong and aren’t valid as a human being.

However, God, through Jesus and the bible, tells us a different story. A story that declares that we are all children of God and we can be proud of who God made us to be. A story of love that knows no bounds and never ends. Which brings us to our readings for today that show that God is always with us, even in times of trouble.

We start with the reading from Acts where we find Paul and Silas thrown in jail. While they may have been feeling scared and worried - they didn’t show it by just sitting around and moping and blaming God for their troubles. Instead, we find them praying and singing hymns and connecting with the other prisoners. In the midst of it all, they kept faithful to God. Then the earthquake happens. Since, at the time, if a guard lost prisoners, it was custom that he would pay for the loss with his life, the guard had assumed that everyone would have fled and thus was about to kill himself. However, Paul and Silas kept faith and stayed where they were and saved the guard’s life - not only physically but also spiritually through their witness to the power of God. This serves not only as a reminder that God will never leave us, but also that we can serve as witnesses to the power and love of God just through who we are and doing what is right - doesn’t take anything special - just through our actions and love they can know God’s love. Just like yesterday and the pride festival. We may think we were just there at a booth, talking to people, and handing out items - but we were witnesses to the love

of Christ through our actions of acceptance, welcome, and love, to the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies.

Then we move to the concluding verses of Revelation. From verse 13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13) While this passage refers to the extremes of the beginning and the end; and the first and the last - we need to remember that God isn't just there at the extreme ends, but everywhere in between. Just like all of creation, God isn't just at one point or another - God is everywhere in between. Not just light and dark, but in all the shades in between - not just day and night but at sunrise and sunset, the dawn and twilight. In all creatures that live in the waters, on the land, and in the sky - and all of those that live in multiple places. And thus God has created all of us - in our many different varied ways - there is no binary in creation - everything spans a wide range to create the beautiful diversity of God's creation - something to be proud of and celebrate. God is ever present across all time, all places, and all creation - the entire Cosmos from the very beginning of creation until the very end.

And not only do we have this promise of God being ever present with us always, we are invited. As it says in Revelation 22:17 - all are invited to come to the Lord and His promises. Everyone who is thirsty and wishes to take the water of life as a GIFT is invited to come. This is a great reminder that God wants us to be in God's presence and

love - we are invited to receive the gift. We do not earn it, we do not have to work for it - it is a gift, a most wondrous gift from God for all.

Then we turn to today's Gospel from John. When I was preparing and first read the Gospel for today - the very first thing I noticed was how this passage starts. It wasn't the words that I noticed - it was that it started with a quotation mark. Now, you'll notice that in the reading we used in our service, a helpful prompt is added at the beginning in brackets to guide the reader, but in the Bible that prompt isn't there. Since I didn't have that prompt and the passage starts with a quotation mark, I knew we were joining in, right in the middle of something, so I backed up to get the context. And then I also remembered this is the time of the church year I tend to get confused.

Just a few weeks ago we experienced the passion story and then the joyful Easter Resurrection. In fact, we are still in the season of Easter. However, for our Gospel readings for a few weeks, we have jumped back in time to hear stories from Jesus and his disciples during Jesus' last evening with them at the last supper. So that is where we are with today's Gospel. Jesus is giving his farewell speech and then praying for his disciples. That is where today's Gospel is from - part of the prayer Jesus shared with his disciples that evening.

While Jesus is praying with and for his disciples, we find that the prayer isn't just for his disciples, as this part of the prayer starts with "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also

on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word". The "behalf of these" is referring to the disciples and "behalf of those" is referring to us, today, and past and future. All of us who believe. You and me and all of God's beloved. Take a moment and let that sink in - Jesus around 2000 years ago was praying for you and me, everyone alive today, and in the past and in the future. I don't know about you, but I find it pretty awesome and also comforting to know that Jesus was praying for all of us - so long ago. In times when we are often scared and facing uncertainty it certainly is a good reminder to know that Jesus and God are on our side and that we are not alone.

So, yes, it is awesome that Jesus is praying for us - but what did he pray for? He prays that we all may be one. Not only that we are one together with each other, but that also we are one together with Christ. We live in a world that wants to label us and put us in many different categories to separate us. However, that is completely opposite of what God wants, which is for all of us to be one in Christ. We have been given God's glory so that we can all be together as one.

While we need to celebrate and take pride in being called together as one in Christ Jesus - we are also given some work to do in this prayer - a reason for us all being called together as one. We are called to act together so that the world, through us, might believe that Jesus was sent from God. Not only to believe that Jesus is God's son, but that God loved the entire cosmos so much that God sent Jesus for us, so that we may experience the grace, love, and forgiveness of God - given to us as a gift. It is

this unconditional grace, love, and forgiveness that we are called to share with the world  
- just like we did yesterday at the pride festival.

So, during Pride month, and always, today's readings remind us we are never alone -  
no matter what we are going through or who we are. We are not alone for two reasons.  
First, we, through the examples of so many stories in the Bible, are not alone because  
we live in community with each other. God clearly sets an example that we are meant to  
be in community with each other (and with the entire creation) to support and build up  
each other - to be one together with each other. Not to divide and label, but to support  
and uplift each other.

Second, we are not alone because we have been promised and reminded time and time  
again that God is always with us. God is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last,  
the beginning and the end. And more importantly God is also everything in between.  
God never ends - and is always with us - and loves all of us exactly for who we are -  
children of God created in God's image. Or in the words of a hymn.

Have good cheer, little flock; have good cheer, little flock,  
for the Father will keep you in his love forever;  
have good cheer, little flock!

May we all learn from the example and prayer of Jesus and work to be united as one with each other and with God and Jesus Christ. Not just to be with each other but also to share God's love with all of creation. From the waters and sky to the grass, trees, and plants, to all the animals that live in the water, on land, or in the sky. And to all of God's beloved children - every one of the LGBTQIA+ community, all our BIPOC siblings, people with every different ability, immigrants seeking safety and shelter, those who are hungry, everyone, especially those that society often shuns, calls an "other" or "less than", and pushes to the margins. Through our words and actions, we can help bring this unity to creation, so we all can be one in Christ.

We do this through the help of God who is always coming to us, every day, not just at the end of times. As it says in Revelation 22:20-21 "Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints." and let the entire church say "AMEN!".