

+ In Nomine Jesu +

John 17:1-11

Date: May 21, 2023

Liturgical Date: Easter 7, A

Title: The king prays

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

In Psalm 122, as the king ascends to the throne, the people shout, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! Peace be within her walls!” The king as he goes up to the place where he will reign readies to pray for the people of God. For peace. For security in their dwelling place. The king prays for peace and security for his people even as the king rules to bring that peace and security. So this King Jesus prays for his people and brings the peace and security, even to life eternal.

The king in his office prays for the people, for deliverance. In the Old Testament, King Hezekiah, the king of Judah, learned that the Assyrian King Sennacherib prepared to attack Jerusalem and threatened destruction. The people of Jerusalem were in great danger. Sennacherib attacked the fortified cities of Judah, and they fell. Hezekiah paid the Assyrian King Sennacherib much gold and silver from the king’s house and even from the house of the Lord. But whatever Hezekiah had paid, it wasn’t enough. The Assyrian king kept threatening Jerusalem, kept prowling around to devour the city.

The Assyrian king even taunted the people of Jerusalem. “Don’t let King Hezekiah trick you into believing that the Lord would deliver you.” The Assyrian king promised the people of Jerusalem many good things - the people would have their own vines and water and honey and olives and figs. Don’t listen to Hezekiah. “Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?” Sennacherib’s words were completely demoralizing to the regular people of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah received the messages and threats from Sennacherib and how Sennacherib taunted the Lord, that no God could stop him. And nobody had yet stopped him.

The messengers tore their clothes at these words. The king tore his clothes at these words. So the king sent messengers to Isaiah son of Amoz, “Isaiah, the king of Assyria has mocked the living God. Pray for the remnant that is left.” Isaiah returns a word of comfort to Hezekiah. Thus says the Lord. Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard. I will make him fall by the sword in his own land. Hezekiah will know that the word from the Lord through the prophet is truth, and that the words that the Assyrian king spoke are nothing but deception.

King Hezekiah responded and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem. “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. So now, O LORD our God,

save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.”

Isaiah sends the beautiful gospel to Hezekiah. A word! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. The Lord answered the king’s prayer. The Lord will preserve a remnant at Jerusalem, a band of survivors at Mount Zion. As for the king of Assyria? Another word! He shall not come into this city, declares the Lord. The Lord acted upon the king’s prayer with great zeal, such zeal that the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. The Lord protected his people and kept them together as the king prayed for his people. The people had peace, not war, not destruction, but peace.

King Jesus is on his way up to his throne. He will be lifted up on the cross. He ascends to his throne, the cross, to give life to his people. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. The king ascends. The king rules. The king gives life.

The hour has come for this king to ascend to his throne. The king lifts up his eyes to heaven and prays. “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” The king is lifted up to be put to death on the cross. Lifted up, Jesus is glorified on the cross. There, high and lifted up, we see the love that God has for the world. How much does God love the world? He sets his king on Zion, his holy hill. This is the king who will pray for peace for his people and the king who will make peace for his people by the blood of his cross.

The king prays, “that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.” This king has authority over all flesh, for he has come in the flesh. This king is lifted up, not in some spiritual sense, but lifted up in the flesh on the cross. His real flesh is nailed to the cross. His real flesh pours out blood and water from the cross. This king comes in the flesh and suffers the death that our sinful flesh deserves. The king’s own flesh is for the life of the world.

So the king prays for those whom the Father has given to him. The king prays that they may have eternal life - in the flesh, as the king has authority over all flesh. This king prays for his people, for their flesh, their bodies. Eternal life is life for the flesh, life for the bodies. This king prays for you, for your flesh, your broken flesh, your aging flesh, your dying and near-dead flesh. This king prays that your flesh would have eternal life.

Even though death threatens and taunts you - who could stop me? - taunts death, there is one who prays for you, that you have eternal life. Even if death taunts you, saying, don’t believe in that Jesus - what can he do for you? Look how many people trusted this Jesus, yet they still died. And in dark days, when it seems that death surrounds you, when you sit in the shadow of death, when hope appears lost, there is one who prays for you. King Jesus prays for you. And the Lord answers his prayer with great zeal. Just as the Lord delivers Jerusalem from Sennachereb when all hope looks gone, so the Lord delivers from death when all hope looks gone.

Jesus prays for eternal life for those whom the Father has given to him. And Jesus brings that eternal life to his people. Eternal life is more than spiritual life, more than escaping this body to be with Jesus. This king comes in the flesh, offering up his body on the cross in place of all flesh. This king leads to eternal life in the flesh by his own resurrection from the dead. Where this king goes, he leads his people. The Lord has victory over the grave, so his people have victory over the grave. Death cannot harm them. This king gives to you eternal life.

This king prays, “For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” Jesus gives the words from the Lord, the words of good news. Jesus gives these words freely to his people, for the comfort of his people. To whom shall his people go? These words are the words of eternal life.

Christ gives the words to his people to give hope when all appears to be lost. King Hezekiah was about to be destroyed. Sennacherib threw all kinds of insults, full of braggadocio, nobody would stop him. King Hezekiah was in great distress. But Isaiah gives the king the word. Do not be afraid of those words from Sennacherib. Thus says the Lord. In addition to these words of comfort, Isaiah gives Hezekiah the words that reveal the Lord’s saving work. Sennacherib shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

Christ gives the words to his people to give hope and life even when life is gone and tears are flowing. Lazarus of Bethany was ill. When Lord heard of it, he stayed two days later where he was. Lazarus fell asleep. Oh if he has fallen asleep he will recover. But Jesus told his disciples plainly what had happened. Lazarus died. The sisters Martha and Mary felt the pain from death. Everybody knew that pain - that pain is too common. Many came to console Martha and Mary. They brought words of consolation to help out. But none of those words changed that Lazarus had died.

Jesus brings words of comfort. Martha already has great faith, she confesses that whatever Jesus asks of God, God will give to him. Whatever Jesus prays for, God will grant. Whether peace or security. Whether a resurrection from the dead. Whether life eternal. Jesus prays for all of these, and God grants them. What she wants is evident, so Jesus promises, your brother will rise again. Yes, I know... the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus speaks beautiful words of comfort. I am the resurrection and the life. These words stir up hope and life even in the face of death. These are the words of eternal life. These are the words of Jesus. Jesus’ words are not merely good teachings. His words are not only full of great wisdom or a new morality code. These words, I am the resurrection and the life, proclaim that Christ was dead and is alive again. Christ has come to raise the dead. Christ brings about a resurrection and life to all who believe. These words, I am the resurrection and the life, stir up the body, the flesh, that is sleeping in the dust of the earth to life eternal. For Christ is the resurrection and the life.

Christ shows how easy it is to raise the dead. He has authority over all flesh, even dead flesh in the grave. Christ prays at Lazarus’ tomb, and no matter how much Lazarus stinketh,

God answers the prayer that sounds similar to Christ's prayer before his crucifixion. "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." So when Jesus calls out, "Lazarus, come out," the dead man comes out. Jesus prays, and so it is. The words bring comfort. God is glorified and revealed in this resurrection. God is the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. God gives life to the dead because he loves his creation and sent his Son into the world, in the flesh, to restore flesh and give eternal life to all who believe in him.

Christ prays for eternal life, in the flesh, for his believers. Now that Christ is ascended, he continues to pray for his people. King Jesus from his seat on the right hand of power continues to pray for his people. Now that Christ is ascended, he continues to fulfill his threefold office as king, as priest, and as prophet. This king has authority over all flesh, to give eternal life in his kingdom of glory. Jesus as priest prays before the Father on behalf of his people. Jesus as prophet speaks the words of comfort, the words of truth - still - to his people through pastors.

So when the fiery trials come, and they will, find comfort that the Lord Jesus prays for you. Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem. Martha and Mary and Lazarus met death. You would have a fiery trial as a test. Perhaps it may be a test that offers stark contrasts - deny Christ or lose your life. Or perhaps the test, the trial, may be more subtle, say the words which would deny God as creator, deny the life of any person, deny that God made them male and female. The trial would be to say the words that are false, which you know are false, just to get along, or get in trouble at work or at school or just get a dirty look.

In the midst of trials, remember that your Lord Jesus prays for you, that you endure the trial, that your faith may not fail. Your Lord Jesus prays for peace for you, that you find peace in Christ alone, in his resurrection from the dead. Whatever trials there are, the Lord Jesus has authority over all flesh, over your flesh, for what could man do to you? The Lord Jesus prays that you would have eternal life, life in the flesh with him. And whatever this king prays for, the Father grants to him.

*Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

Rev. Michael J. Bahr