



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2020

by Garland F. Pierce

Time to Be One

John 17:1-11

17:1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,

17:2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

17:4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

17:5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

17:6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

17:7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;

17:8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

17:9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

17:10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

17:11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

This past Thursday, May 21, many in the church celebrated the Ascension of the Lord, marking forty days after his resurrection and how he continued to walk on earth giving comfort and charge to his disciples. The disciples were still confused as to when and how he would bring about the kingdom of God. His ascending into heaven let them know that the kingdom of God was on this earth and so far beyond it.

However, before he ascended, before he was resurrected, even before he was crucified and buried, Jesus prayed. He prayed for his disciples. He prayed for us. He knew what lied ahead for him: betrayal, arrest, the cradle to prison pipeline designed by bias and greed of Empire, and crucifixion, the form of capital punishment of the day. He knew what lied ahead for him: resurrection, ascension, and eternal reign. He knew also what lied ahead for his disciples: suffering, loss, pain, power struggles, differences, disagreements, and division. He prayed, not for power or wealth or status for himself or his followers. He prayed, "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

The pandemic has exposed the deep divisions among us, based on race, class, political leanings, and other differences. The fear and the rancor could very well destroy us before the virus ever does. We have heard it said by celebrities and via commercials, ads, and hashtags. If we are to survive and get through this, we will only be able to do so by being, staying, and working together. Our savior knew it and so he prayed that we would be one. Differences do not have to lead to division. There can be unity in diversity. If a vaccine is to be discovered, if people are to be healed and all have access to quality healthcare, if our global economy is to recover, and if the church is to be the relevant and credible witness of the grace and saving, liberating power of God, then we will have to be one. Jesus prayed that we would be. If he prayed for it, then it is already God's gift to us! Therein lies the promise and the protection. We are one! Now is the time for us to live it!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect and/or share—What divisions have you noticed/witnessed in these recent days and weeks that have given you reason for real concern? In what small ways can you begin to address these differences?

Read or recite the Apostle's Creed, our Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

PRAY: Make us one, Lord. Make us one. Holy Spirit, make us one. Let your love flow so the world will know we are one in You. AMEN

ACT:

1. Many ecumenical (or interdenominational) organizations such as council of churches work to live out the unity, for which Christ prayed. Many of the churches in the Southern Hemisphere celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity during this period around Pentecost (others in the North in January). Learn more about the local, regional, national, and international ecumenical organizations of which the AME Church is a member. For information on the World Council of Churches and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, visit: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/prayer-for-christian-unity-prepares-the-way-for-pentecost>

The National Council of Churches, USA will hold a virtual ecumenical memorial service for those who have died of COVID-19 on Sunday, May 24. To learn more, visit: <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us>

2. See also the craft activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Blest Be the Tie That Binds
AMEC Hymnal, #522

1. Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Chris-tian love:
The fel-low-ship of kin-dred minds
Is like to that a-bove.
2. Be-fore our Fa-ther's throne
We pour our ar-dent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our com-forts and our cares.
3. We share each oth-er's woes,
Our mu-tual bur-dens bear,
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our com-forts and our cares.
4. When we a-sun-der part,
It gives us in-ward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet a-gain.

Alternative Song:

Make Us One, <https://youtu.be/LexfHKBZGuc>

By Carol Cymbala, *America's Newest Praise & Worship Favorites*, Vol. 1

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



Title: The Ascension

Notes: JESUS MAFA is a response to the New Testament readings from the Lectionary by a Christian community in Cameroon, Africa. Each of the readings was selected and adapted to dramatic interpretation by the community members. Photographs of their interpretations were made, and these were then transcribed to paintings. Date: 1973

The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.