

Easter 7C, 2010 (Confirmation)

Text: John 17:20-26

Title: Connected to Christ

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Jesus prays for you. On the night when He is betrayed, Jesus prays for you. Jesus doesn't pray for Himself, Jesus prays for you, brothers and sisters in Christ. And Jesus prays especially for you – Max and Franny.

Jesus prays for those who will believe in Him through the apostles' word. Today we will rejoice to hear Franny and Max confess their faith. You will stand and boldly confess that you believe in God the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit, and that you would gladly die, rather than fall away from it.

You believe these things, because they have been taught them through the prophet and apostolic Scriptures. You believe these things, because the Holy Spirit has been at work through this word to strengthen your faith.

So it is for you, today, that Jesus prays. And you're going to need it.

Jesus prays that you would be one, that you would be united with one another and with Him.

Sin is the great divider. Sin makes us enemies of God and of one another. Sin fractures our families and communities. Sin drives us apart from our loved ones. Sin divides.

First, sin separates you from God. When you sin against God, you actually offend God and anger Him. Sin is a big deal. Sin makes you an enemy of God.

We like to think of God as someone who's always loving and tolerant and never gets upset. We like to think of God as a big pushover. The big Ned Flanders in the sky.

But sin ruins your relationship with God. When you sin, you are telling God to get lost, that you don't want to live your life His way. You are telling God, "I know better than You do, and I'm going to do things my way."

Sin divides. It separates you from God. And it separates you from one another.

Sin is the reason for the fighting and bickering in our families. Sin is the reason for divorce.

Sin is the reason why we can't get along with one another.

Sin puts yourself first, instead of your neighbor's needs. Sin can lead to damaging addictions. We think that we can control sin and its effects. We think that we can sin a little and get away with it. But when we sin it makes us all more alone.

Max, Franny, I'm sure that you've seen how sin can divide people. You probably have had friendships that have been ruined by lying, by gossiping, by cheating, or by selfishness. You've seen the damage that sin can do in dividing. You've seen the cliques at school, the bullying, the teasing, the disrespect for teachers and their authority. You might be guilty of these things yourself. This is all sin.

Sin causes the greatest division of all- death. Sin will cause you to be separated from your friends and family in a very real way when you die. Sin will separate you from everything in this life, even from life itself.

But Jesus came not to divide, but to unite. Jesus prays that you would be one, that you would be united in Him. Jesus came to put an end to sin, and by His death to put to death everything that divides us.

Jesus comes as the answer to His own prayer, that we would be one.

Jesus makes you one, by connecting you to Himself. There is one body of Christ, one church, and Jesus makes you one with Him by connecting you to Himself.

We are connected to one another in many ways. These days we are connected electronically to more people than ever before. With "Facebook" you have over 400 million potential friends from across the globe. You can stay connected by text, e-mail and twitter. I know that you're both well-connected. I've seen your phones.

But sometimes, no matter how many friends we have, no matter how fast our internet connection, even if you have unlimited texting, you're still going to feel disconnected. You will feel alone and lonely, like no one understands you, no one gets you, no one really cares about you.

But you have a connection that's stronger and deeper than any of these. You have a friend whose closer than any others – Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes you a part of His very body. Jesus is in you in the same way that Jesus is in the Father. Just as the Father and the Son are one God, so you and Jesus Christ are one body. Jesus connects you to Himself.

This connection begins at our baptism. Franny and Max, you were both baptized, and there you became part of the body of Christ. Jesus wrote His name on your forehead with the water and the sign of the cross, marking you as belonging to Him.

Jesus joined you to His life, His death and resurrection, so that just as Jesus rose from the dead, so you, too, have new life.

Even though you have been baptized, sometimes you haven't lived like it. You haven't lived as though you belonged to Jesus and were a part of His body. You have lived as though you were separate from Him, as though you were on your own.

That's where Holy Absolution comes in. On Wednesday evening you both kneeled at this altar and spoke these words, "I have lived as though God did not matter, and as if I mattered most."

But then you heard God speak these words back to you, "I forgive you all your sins."

Forgiveness is what connects us back to Christ, brings us back to being a part of His body. Forgiveness heals and restores this broken connection.

In a few moments you will be connected to Jesus Christ in a yet more deeper way. You will kneel once more at the altar to receive Jesus' own body and blood.

Jesus will put into your mouth the same body that was broken on the cross for you. He gives you His body to eat to unite Himself to you, to connect you in a real, physical way. At the altar you become one with God.

Jesus will put into your mouth the same blood that was shed on the cross for you. His blood will now flow through your veins and unite you with Himself, making you alive with His divine life.

And you will not be the only ones who kneel at this altar today. You will kneel here with the rest of the body of Christ. Take a look around you. Go ahead.

Today Jesus will connect you to all those who receive His body and blood at this altar. That's why we call it communion; the Lord's Supper brings us all together in the community of Faith.

You will be united today with all the members of the body of Christ, not just in this place, but throughout all the world. Wherever the body and blood of Christ are, there you will be connected to the body of Christ.

And not just the people who are alive today, but you will be connected to all the saints who have gone before you, everyone who is a part of the body of Christ, both here on earth and in heaven itself will be joined together in Holy Communion. Jesus connects us all, past and present, here at the altar.

You are an important part of the body of Christ. You are a valuable member of the church. The body of Christ is here for you, to support you, to care for you, and to encourage you.

And there are many ways for you to help and support the body of Christ in this place. Pray for the members of this congregation, give generously from what you have received from the Lord, and come here regularly to support and encourage the other members of the body.

I know that both of you have played sports. Think about how much the team suffers when one of the star players is missing. When you aren't here, the whole body suffers. We miss you and we are weaker when you aren't with us, when you are disconnected from us.

In the years to come Satan will try to do his work in dividing you and separating you from the body of Christ. Satan will try to convince you that you're better off alone, that you're better off doing things your own way. That the church is a place for kids and old people, and that you don't belong here.

Satan will try to convince you that there are more important things to do on Sunday morning than come to the Divine Service. Satan will try to separate you from the body of Christ, from Jesus Christ himself, by keeping you away from His body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Satan has done a good job of this in the past. If you look around you, you will see that many people who have been confirmed at this altar are no longer here or at any other altar to receive the body and blood of Christ.

In a few moments you will promise "to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully." Many folks have broken this promise and are no longer faithful in hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper. It's not just young people. Folks of all ages have broken their promises to the Lord. It's a hard promise to keep on your own.

But remember, you are not alone. You are a part of the body of Christ. Your fellow Christians are here today to help you keep your promises. And even more, Jesus Christ Himself is in you. It is only through Christ that you will live according to His Word and remain faithful.

After you make your promises, Jesus will give you the Holy Spirit to help you to keep them. You are not making your confirmation today. Jesus is confirming you. As you kneel, you will hear these words, "The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting."

And He will.