

## Prayer for the Family

Based on John 17:6-19

"You know what's wrong with the education system today?" someone cornered me with not too long ago. "No," I thought to myself, "but I suspect you are about to tell me." The person continued, "The problem with the education system today is that they no longer recite the Lord's Prayer in class. If we just started praying in schools again, everything would turn around." "Well," I said myself, "Yes, it would certainly be a good thing if that were to happen, but I think the issue is more complicated than just that.

"Furthermore," the person continued. "Oh dear," I hummed to myself. I thought we were finished." "The problem with families these days, is that they don't sit around the table and pray before they eat supper." "Yes," I replied. "Family life is certainly complicated these days," privately snickering to myself as I imagined a 'normal' family dinner at my house! The person did not seem impressed with my answers, and promptly turned to share his wisdom elsewhere in the room.

Yes, it would be wonderful if schools once again, invited

God into the classroom. Yes, it would be wonderful if every family in the country sat down in perfect harmony, like a Norman Rockwell picture, ate their meal politely, and remembered their manners when they asked, "Pass the potatoes, please!" But those days are gone, in many ways, and in many homes. They have been gone for a long time. And like many churches, who are struggling to realize that they have been out of the game for many years, now, it's time you and I caught up on the scene.

We had a high school in our city on lock down this week, friends. Thankfully, it was an unrelated incident, but the world has caught up to Vernon. We have grandparents raising grandchildren in their retirement years. We have complex families with multiple parents, mother in the basement suite, friends having sleepovers because

the anger in their own home has reached a critical level, and herb dispensaries within arm's length. So here is the part where you throw up your hands and say, "All hope is lost! What ever are we to do about all this?" Right? Wrong.

Today's scriptures lesson finds Christ at one of the final quiet moments before the beginning of the end. Knowing that betrayal was just around the corner, Jesus chose to take this quiet time, not so much to pray for Himself, but to pray for His disciples: for their protection, for their persistence as the new leaders they would need to be; for their willingness to continue to be good examples, trustworthy and dedicated to sharing the Word of God.

Jesus knew then, that His death was not the end of the story. He knew that future ministry would continue, but it would look very different. The warm memories of teaching on green meadows with children on His knee had come and gone. That time was over. What the future of the faith looked like, was in part, still a mystery. So, as Jesus steeled himself for the events that were about to unfold around Him, He prayed to His father: to console and comfort the disciples on this next chapter,

and to give them courage to be faithful leaders.

*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. 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. (v11)*

Now, I hope you notice, Christ did not pray that the faithful would continue to worship exactly as they had in past; serve exactly like they had in the past; or continue thinking exactly as they had in the past. He prayed that the faithful, would remain, faithful; that prayers would continue; that ministry would take life in new and in familiar places.

Yes, the world has changed. Our families have changed. And the place of prayer in our daily routine has changed. But prayer has not changed. The power of prayer to affect change has not changed. The ability of each and every one of us to pray has not changed. In fact, this changing world may

have given us the opportunity, instead, to look for creative ways to pray, in addition to bended knee at our bedside, or with heads bowed in worship.

Maybe our role in all this is not to “tisk-tisk” those families who don’t look or act like a Norman Rockwell picture, but to be prayerful, and prayer-filled, in the unexpected places: like in the middle of cookie crumbed faces of small children, words of encouragement to teens raking your leaves, or a cup of sugar to the new neighbour who just moved in.

Christ prayed, not that the world would stay the same, but that as the world continued to move forward, the faithful would remain faithful. “I pray for them,” (v9) Christ said, that they would remember The Word (v14), that they would live by the truth (v17), that they would see the joy in others (v13).

Today we honor those we would call family: relatives, companions, lovers, friends,

young, old, care-givers, neighbours, familiar pew faces on Sunday morning, and even perhaps, the woman who greets us daily at the Tim Horton’s drive through. Perhaps if were to spend more time ‘praying for’ or encouraging ‘prayer-filled moments’ for our ‘families’, rather than looking for what is ‘wrong’ with our families, we might be reminded that there is power in prayer, and the Holy Spirit is busy at work within our communities.

You know what is wrong with our families today? Not a thing. Let us pray...

*You will notice we say  
"brother and sister" 'round  
here,  
It's because we're a family  
and these are so near;  
When one has a heartache, we  
all share the tears,  
And rejoice in each victory in  
this family so dear.  
~The Family of God (Gaither)*