

Baby showers, graduation parties and cancer support groups have something in common. Who would think it? Baby showers are all about giving presents to the soon-to-be new parents, aren't they? But scratch the surface of anyone in the room and they will say about the couple "They have no idea what is about to hit them". The tiny toes and fingers wrap themselves around our hearts and transform the meaning of our existences. Graduation parties are the same way: a moment of celebration about accomplishments, yet the revelers want to say to the new graduates: "Linger here for a split second more: graduation means that life is about to get more complex, less defined, more unpredictable than it was a second ago. Rush/don't rush." Any medical support group is built on the assumption that those who have been down the road a bit know what is about to happen: the tests, the treatments, the fears ,

the hopes, the process, the exhaustion, the frustration, the triumphs.

There are moments in life when we know what is about to happen before someone else does. We have been down a particular road and know the territory. We also know that the person before us cannot anticipate and be prepared for exactly what is going to happen. We who have been there in the past can anticipate the impact. We often want to prepare them with sage advice, wisdom from the road. But there is only so much preparation that we can do. At some point we can go no further with them: their road is their road: their path their path. It is a tender moment when we let them go into their own path of walking and destiny. The closer we are to that person, the more intimate the moment feels and the more we can feel in our own being the tenuous temerity of the road ahead.

Our gospel story catches Jesus in one of these intimate moments. It is the last night of Jesus' life. Tensions have built between him and the leaders of both church and state. The Roman leaders fear his growing popularity. The conflict with the temple authorities has gotten out of hand. The Jewish crowds, as always during the Passover feast time in Jerusalem, seek respite from the Roman oppressors and riots can spontaneously breakout. The stage is set for Jesus to be in the uncharted, but highly predictable, place of death as an insurrectionist. At this point in the gospel story, events have been set in motion. Judas has left. Capture is at hand. Jesus can easily surmise what is to come next. Whatever happens, he knows that it is not going to be good. There will be much unknown, much suffering.

Jesus is with his beloved followers, eating and talking together for the last time. It is a time of great intimacy. Jesus is having one of

those moments that we just described: a moment when you know what is coming but the other person or persons do not. There is no way that the disciples see the path ahead, but he does. In this part of the gospel of John, he speaks to them of all the final things that he wants them to know, like his final parting wisdom. He speaks to them of things that they cannot possibly understand, just like we are apt to do at times like this, trying to prepare them for what is to come. But they have no concept, they could not possibly have a concept. He then prays this intimate prayer:

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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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.”*

In those times when we know what is coming and the others don't, we often find ourselves in prayer as well: in intimate prayer with God, where we lift the ones we love into the very presence of the One Who Knows All from the Beginning. To this One we say the things that we know are essential to the situation.

For parents-to-be, we might pray like this, “Holy Father/Mother, you know that the love they are about to experience for this child will knock their socks off. Along with that love, please give them patience, wisdom, and a huge capacity to forgive.”

For the graduates we might pray, “Oh, God of change and transition walk with them through

their valleys of fears and their mountaintops of exultation: help them to call out to you in times of distress and remember you in times of decision.”

For those in the middle of a medical situation, we might entreat, “Oh, Great Healer, bestow upon them the gift of healing, healing that begins in the soul and permeates into the body, and also a special grace of your felt presence in this time of fearfulness.”

So, Jesus, in this intimate time of prayer, knowing that he knows more than his disciples, prays this prayer: “Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one.” In the midst of what is to come: the capture, the arrest, the trial, the beatings, the mocking, the horrible death, the hurried burial, the confusing empty tomb, the resurrection experiences, what he asks for is that they may be one.

What a strange thing to ask for; not for patience, or courage, or strong presence, or wisdom, or forgiveness, or anything but this: that they may be one. When all pandemonium is about to break loose, what does Jesus want for these who have been his followers? That they be one, that they hang together, that they are together and unified. Yes, the biggest thing that happens in unhealthy families and societies that are in crisis is that the connection falls apart, that it becomes every person for themselves....and so Jesus is saying to God: just hold them together. If you hold them together, then their needs will be met. "I am leaving them God," he prays, "but don't let them leave one another. If they just hang together, they will be fine."

As we look at this passage and see this prayer, we have some wonderings. We wonder if this means that if pandemonium has come, our first order of business is to come together

and recognize where and how we are one? We wonder if this means that there is more that unites us than that divides us? We wonder if this implies that if we are not united, then there could be pandemonium in the air and it is our job to get back to resting in our unity? We ponder what the world might be like if first all Christians, and then all persons of faith, and then all who yearn for the Divine were united? At the very least, this intimate prayer speaks volumes about the priority on Jesus' mind as he goes into this next phase of his relationship to his followers, his students, his disciples, and his friends: that his little band of beloveds be kept together. Knowing this, our wonderings can include this priority of Jesus and we can pray the same prayer from our lips:

“Holy God, protect us all in the name of love, so that together we may be one, as you are one.”