

May 17, Easter 7A (John 17:1–11)

I want God to keep us safe. Jesus wants to make us one.

by [Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue

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Perhaps nothing has done more to make me a prayerful person than being a parent has. The conditions and cruelties of this world surely fuel the anxiety with which I wave goodbye to my children each day, for if we are honest with ourselves, safety is an illusion. So I pray fervently for their protection, their growth, their joy, and their grace. My sanity and nerves usually also make that list. As I grow older—this happens every day, it seems!—I am beginning to understand more fully why so many of us had praying grandmothers.

Even in this, I know that many of those prayers are wealthy beyond measure. We have not ever been left begging for bread, left without a home or water to drink—a claim that many people in the world today cannot make. I believe many things about prayer, including that even in its most mundane of forms, it has miraculous power if it can keep us going yet another day.

So why don't we pray with Jesus more? For as much as we have memorized the Lord's Prayer—a political theology unto itself if we mean it when we say the words, beyond rote memorization—we seem to spend far less time surrounded in the other prayers Christ prayed for us. And it seems no coincidence that here, celebrating the seventh Sunday of Easter, we find the tender prayers of our Lord, commissioning us with great care: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

The discourse in the Upper Room, with so many things said (and perhaps, so many left unsaid), over a table filled with love and heartbreak, anticipatory grief and joy, loyalty and betrayal, closes here: Jesus praying that they may be one. Not a voting block nor a war machine nor a dictatorship, but one in fellowship, purpose, community, and love. "As we are one," that Christ's joy may be made complete. This is not simply a transition of powers (even as Pentecost cometh!) but a communal sharing in fellowship and purpose. This is a benediction for the life of faith.

I must admit that unity has not been a hallmark of my prayers as of late. Inundated with the injustices, silences, ignorances, redactions, and erasures of this world and specifically the denials of my own country, my prayers have sounded more like imprecatory psalms than not. But they haven't been able to stay there, either—though possibly a temporary salve, violent condemnations are not a cure for a broken soul. And these prayers alone often leave me feeling more helpless than hopeful. But here Jesus reminds us that the point is not to be left to destruction and division.

And here is where I appreciate the moment of pause. Surrounded by discord, what does it mean to resist succumbing to disunity? I think it requires a look back at all that Jesus does and experiences in John, all the transgressing of socially imposed borders and boundaries, the radical welcome and hospitality, and the insistences on love as an ethic of life and care. Christ prays this on the precipice of the false arrest that will lead to his gruesome torture and murder. And even here, he reminds us of his joy.

We do not have many images of Christ laughing, or resting, or singing, playing, dancing—much less drawing or painting or building. But he claims his joy. And he reminds us that in this work, we have help. We are not alone. The lectionary leaves the pericope incomplete—for as Jesus prays for himself, and then prays for his disciples, if

we continue on a few more verses we find Jesus praying for all those who believe. And if we press on just a little while longer in liturgical time, we find that tongues of fire will also fall. We *will* speak and listen and understand, not so that we will be the same, but so that we may be one.

We live in a fractured world, but those who seek humility, mercy, justice, and good seem to be on the same page. Which might suggest that when we resist narrations that would conflate and collapse, rather than imagine and expand, that we are drawing closer to who Christ is. May we always again receive this benediction, even if it is the blessing to go forth and begin again.