



June 2, 2019

Jesus Gives His Followers Strength to Face the Future Pastor Shelley Cunningham


John 17:20-26 NLT

²⁰"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

²²"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

²⁵"O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is that of David and Goliath. You know how it goes: David is a scrawny shepherd boy. He's been dispatched to bring provisions to his big brothers, who are away at war. They're fighting with the dreaded Philistine army. Or at least, they're supposed to be fighting. But when David shows up they're mainly just hiding in their tents. That's because the Philistines have this incredible fighter. He's colossal. And he's challenged the Israelites to send out their best soldier for a showdown, *mano-a-mano*. Now David is no match for the giant. He has no military training. He's not even strong enough to wear a soldier's armor or wield a sword. But David did believe God was on his side. And so he went down to the creekbed and picked out five smooth stones, stuffed his trusty slingshot in his back pocket, and marched out into the meadow to face the



giant. And you know the rest: That first little rock smacked giant Goliath right between the eyes and took him down. And David took a mighty step towards fulfilling God's plan that he would become Israel's greatest king.

So I have just one question: Why did David bring so many rocks?

It's clear he trusted God to deliver him. Right before he throws the first stone at Goliath, David gives this big long speech about how the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, will ensure his victory, so the whole world may know God is with the people Israel. And then after he launches that stone he waits to see how it lands instead of reloading his slingshot.


So why does he need five stones? Wouldn't just one do?

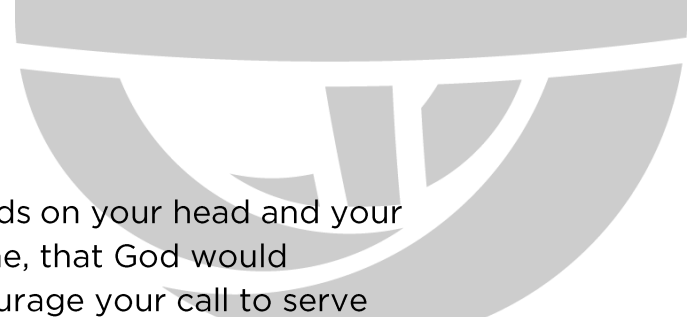
Perhaps it's because even though David believes God is with him ... he doesn't know exactly what it will take to get the job done. Those extra rocks give him security; confidence that even if his first try misses the mark, he's still got plenty of other opportunities in his pocket.

Sometimes it's those 'extra rocks' that help us face our Goliath-sized challenges, too. We all have days when we feel woefully unprepared for what lies ahead. Staring at a major deadline at work ... dreading a confrontation with a friend ... heading into the great unknown as you leave the familiar routine of high school or college: These things can leave us feeling like we're on shaky ground. And we're living in an uncertain world, with change coming at us faster than we can manage sometimes. Too many of us are stretched to the breaking point, when it feels we're just one missed deadline or unexpected expense or poor night's sleep from snapping. We need help.

Good news: I want to give you an extra rock. It comes from today's gospel lesson in John. Arm yourself with the knowledge that Jesus is praying for you. Yes, you. At his hour of deepest need, right before he faced the greatest challenge of his own life, Jesus stopped to pray for you — that you might have what you need to face the future.

Jesus wasn't talking about taking on giants, at least not like David did. But he was asking God for protection and peace in times of trial. "I pray not only for these disciples," Jesus said, "but for all who will ever believe in me." Have you ever had anyone pray for you out loud before? [Graduates — you have, right here on your confirmation day. You knelt up here, surrounded by






your parents and your pastors. We put our hands on your head and your shoulders. And then we prayed for you, by name, that God would strengthen your faith, guide your life, and encourage your call to serve others. Do you remember that day? I do. Or] perhaps you've stopped up for prayers for healing after communion. Maybe something was weighing heavy on your heart and you desperately wanted to lessen the burden a bit. And because someone else was offering the words you could just listen and feel and know that you aren't alone. Or maybe you wanted to stop but didn't because you were afraid you might. Friends, that's ok. We have Kleenex. Trust me, I use them. Having someone pray for you out loud is a powerful experience.


So now imagine that the person praying for you is Jesus. The one who is one with God, the one whose heart of love and compassion is greater than we can imagine. Jesus knew that life can be incredibly difficult. He knew that there would be struggles and disagreements and conflict, and so he prayed for unity. He knew there would be doubts and dark days, so he prayed that we would feel his presence always.

Friends, what is it you need most from Jesus? Or, put another way, what do you need Jesus to pray for you today? Maybe for courage to have a hard conversation. Maybe for stamina to endure a particularly exhausting season of life. Maybe for wisdom to discern your next steps. Maybe for rest and healing for aching bodies and broken dreams. Or maybe you don't know where to start and you're ready to just turn it all over: *Jesus, just pray for what you think I need.* Talk about walking the walk of faithfulness.

The truth is, we do need Jesus praying for us now as much as ever. The days ahead are uncertain. The road is wide open with possibilities. Our congregation is entering into a building project that has the potential to transform our space and expand our reach into our community and beyond. Our synod has elected a new bishop who is brimming with energy and passion. Our young people are setting forth to learn and serve and grow and their parents are preparing to let them go.

It can be tempting to think that we have the capacity to control what comes next. That we can just work a little harder or manage a little better or plan a little more carefully. And I know you people: You are resourceful and brilliant and gifted and faithful. God has abundantly blessed you with what you need to face whatever life throws your way. It comes in the form of





friends who listen, and a church that cares, and a desire to make a difference in the world. Those are good rocks to have in your back pocket. Add to it the assurance that Jesus is praying for you and you just might find the strength to face the future after all.

That's because Jesus' prayer comes with a promise: As you follow Jesus into a changing world, you do not go alone. God goes with you. We hear that promise in these words from Isaiah 43: *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you ... because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.* And in these from Matthew 28: *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Take these words to heart. They are trustworthy and true. And as you set forth to face whatever giants await you, may this prayer be your guide:

O Lord, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us. Trusting in the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

