My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord of our Eastertide Bodies, Hearts, Souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

Can you believe it’s been 7 weeks since Easter? Time flies when we’re having fun, doesn’t it? But we’ve covered a lot of ground trying to make sense of Easter and the Resurrection, not just in historical terms, but for our lives as well. If we think about this long enough and hard enough, the enormity of what God does for us in our lives can easily overwhelm us in it’s complexity. So that’s why, since Easter, we’ve been trying switch from using our minds to understand things, because our minds like order and stability, patterns and predictability. When we think about the Resurrection with our minds, our faith can actually get short-circuited. And why is that? Because the Resurrection isn’t about explaining a historical factoid of Jesus’ death. It’s about feeling the impact of God’s devotion to us as God’s creation.

The Resurrection is a heart thing.

It’s why the lectionary points us to the Gospel of John each Eastertide. John’s Gospel isn’t easy reading. It’s repetitive, it wraps around itself, and it has complicated sentences. But only the Gospel of Love can help us understand what is happening as we get glimpses of what Jesus has told us, has planned for us, but more importantly, has given us this very day, in this very place, with each and all of us together. Love in unity and in community. Today’s words are words of the heart, since prayer is essentially a feeling thing, a love overflowing thing, our joys and sorrows and triumphs and losses, it’s not a scorecard or a ledger. There are no winners or losers in prayer. So let’s just take a little more time to set our hearts to listen to today’s scripture.

And yes, that means we’ll read it again. Together. But with our hearts first. Now a few brief comments.

We often refer to ourselves as “in the world but not of the world”, and this is the scripture that gives rise to it. But Jesus is not contrasting the physical world around him with some other spiritual world. Jesus is trying to help us see all forces and structures that prevent God’s purposes from being fulfilled. For Jesus, God’s will as he has communicated it is paramount, and he reminds us that just as the world has rejected him, it will also reject us. So let’s be ready for that. When we advocate for God’s will—justice, mercy, compassion, and love, for the downtrodden, the brokenhearted, the disinherited, the naked and hungry, the prisoner—the first question we will get is “how you gonna pay for that?”. God doesn’t ask that as a qualifier for helping folks. Neither do we.

Second, let’s not mistake the unity spoken of as some kind of call to denominational union. The unity Jesus is talking about is unity between God and Jesus, which is God and the Church. Human hubris and ambition get quite wrapped up in the denominational tenets below that level. Just look at all the folks who say churches should not allow communion based on a person’s view of reproductive freedom, the death penalty, or a raft of other issues. Jesus doesn’t ask that as a qualifier for helping folks. Neither do we.

Last, chapters 13-17 of the Gospel of John are John’s version of the Last supper, and it follows a pattern which we should be familiar with. All great leaders give a last testimony to prepare those who come after them, and also give some forward thoughts and prayer. Lincoln at the second inaugural in 1864, laying out a vision for a new America after the Civil War. Douglas MacArthur saying to a joint session of Congress “old soldiers never die, they just fade away…I am an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty.”

They want us prepared to go on after them in honor, reverence, and memory. It’s what Jesus is doing in praying for the disciples. He prayed for what he did for them and how they responded. He prayed for their protection and unity, not for unity’s sake, but for them to be a believable witness to the world. Jesus knew—and we should too—that a divided and unloving community has no power to move hearts toward God’s kingdom.

Jesus prayed for joy, the deep grace of God, as the world turns their backs on the disciples. Jesus does NOT pray for their death, but for their life and protection from temptation, and he prays for their sanctification in truth.

In 24 hours Pilate will ask Jesus, “What is truth?”

Listen again for Jesus prayer for the disciples and for all of us who are here, faithful to God’s Truth.

(re-read, slowly, John 17:6-19)

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Prayers can leave us with a feeling of one long, extended “ought to be” that is overwhelming. But Easter is a time of liberation from exhaustion, of hope and new beginnings. So here is the Truth: The Light came into the World, walked among us, taught us, and the world did not understand the Truth but sought to kill it. The world attempted to destroy the Truth with lies and humiliation, in the most painful way possible, a crucifixion. But God raised the Truth up, held it as a witness to all the nations, and said nothing this world can do can ever destroy what God has intended for all—love of God’s image in all of us, loving one another because God loved us first. And that’s the Truth. So, friends, brothers and sisters, that is why we say that there is no way but through the cross, through death of our former selves to a new truth, a new light, and a new beginning. For that, thanks be to God, Amen.