

*6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 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. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.*

*11 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. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.*

*17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

Getting ready for the rummage sale, Don Weiland pushed aside a ceiling panel in the fellowship hall. Though I've been in that room hundreds of times, though my life and safety has depended on what was hidden by those panels, I had never seen the steel girders that cross that room. They carry the weight of snows, the tons of water that rush toward the drains in a downpour of rain. For forty years they have done their work, unseen.

We see what is on the surface. We forget what lies beneath.

Think of your home. You know all the surfaces so well. But unless the roof leaks, or the floor joists creak it is as if nothing but the surfaces exist. Yet the surface matters so little next to what is hidden from our gaze.

Jesus spoke a prayer long ago. He prayed for many things on that night of his betrayal. But this morning I want to pick out just one sentence.

Jesus prayed, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one."

Jesus prayed this prayer for you. Later in his prayer he says that he prays not only for the eleven disciples but also for those who would believe through their word. Jesus prays this prayer for you.

The Son asks the Father to protect you from the evil one.

Imagine this prayer of Jesus hidden beneath the surfaces of your life. Unseen, yet present every hour of the day and night, the Father has shielded you from evil. Wherever you are, whatever happens, you are being sheltered from the evil one.

Faith is looking beyond the surface. Everyone can see the facades of life: prosperity and pain, beauty and storms, birth and death. As Jesus says in this prayer he does not take us out of the world. But in Jesus Christ God has revealed to you what is beneath the surface, the love of God that is like the girders keeping all the weight from falling upon you, collapsing on you.

Sin in you, your sin mars all the surfaces of your life, but beneath the surface Jesus reveals the forgiveness of God that brings a new beauty when all is ugliness, brokenness.

Death is marching toward you, relentless, devouring all in its path. But the Father who raised the Son has given you the vision beyond the surface of death to see the eternal life that will be yours.

Jesus, who has done all this for us, prays for you that God will protect you from the evil one - even when you are not aware, protected.

Sometimes I think about prayer. Maybe Jesus prayer is like the main structure, supporting the sheltering love of God. And your prayers the crisscrossing beams adding strength.

Is that what we will see when the ceiling panels of our lives have been pushed aside at the end? Will we see that prayers we never knew were prayed for us have meant more in our lives than all our anxiety and effort? Will we be shown how little depended upon ourselves, how very much was gifted to us through the prayers of Jesus and of his people? I believe that we will be shown just that.

Paul tells us, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." On the surface we see all our working, but beneath all that we do is the working of God, the support and working of God's people.

Remember Jesus' prayer. As you are busy working out your life remember Jesus' prayer that you be protected from the evil one.

Remember.