The finals are turned in, and exams are written. Celebration parties are planned. Copies of Dr. Seuss’ “Oh, the places you’ll go” are flying off the bookstore shelves. Valedictorian speakers have been chosen, and caps and gowns have been ordered and are just waiting to be tossed in the air. Yes, friends, it is that time of the year. Graduation season. It’s that particular time of year that is full of that happy reminiscing kind of sad of things ending and that semi-anxiety ridden hope of new beginnings. It’s an in-between time. Or, if we still remember our SAT vocab, what we would call a liminal time. Transition time. Personally, I love this time of year, because being in this kind of in-between time is a great space to learn about ourselves and about God. To learn about how we relate to God, to each other, and to ourselves. It is a great time to do this because the air is full of change and potential. During times like this, we are not lulled into the ruts of going through the motions, sticking to a routine. In these liminal moments, aspects of our lives are dying, and aspects of our lives are being brought into new life. And isn’t that what the Easter season is all about new life out of dead things. So whether you’re a senior looking forward to college, or a junior getting ready to be the top dog senior year. Or maybe your a newly married person figuring out how precisely the marital arithmetic of making $1 + 1 = 1$ whole works. Or maybe your newly widowed trying to figure out what to do when $1+1 = 1$ loses 1. Maybe you’re at the beginning of a career, in the middle of it, or just retired. When you really get down to it whatever situation you personally find yourself in today, there is a good chance some part of your life is in a liminal state. An in-between time. And while being in these transition times might not be the most comfortable place to be I invite to live in to it. Just be in it. Don’t try to rush through it, because God is with us in these in-between times.

Today’s Gospel reading is in one of these in-between times. Today’s passage is a section of the High Priestly prayer that Jesus prayed as part of the farewell dialogue, and it is the shift point from Jesus’s ministry and the beginning of the Passion narrative. Liturgically, we are in another sort of in-between time. This is the Sunday of Easter that is in-between Ascension Day and Pentecost. Liturgically, Jesus has left us and ascended into heaven. But the Holy Spirit has not yet descended upon us. Liturgically we are kind of stuck in the middle, stuck in the in-between time. But when you embrace this being stuck in between, you realize what an awesome place it is to be. It is during these times that we start to focus in on the core of the important and essential things in life. Since we are stuck here, we might as well look around. Look deeper into this text; this High Priestly prayer. If we see this prayer through a different lens, I think it shows just how much God loves us and the way God loves us.

About a decade ago, it was early August and I was packing up the car and and heading to the Hill. Fayetteville that is. Moving into Yocum hall to start freshman year at the Walton College of Business. And as my parents were helping me move into the dorm a little ritual seemed to be playing out across all the floors of the dorm room. This ritual was called “putting off goodbye.” You see there is sort of ballet that's played out between sons and mothers when leaving for college, and I'm sure it's the same daughters and fathers and every combination therein as well. A ballet of saving face and looking calm cool and collected while at the same time realizing this is a big, scary, change and how can I let them know that I love them without directly saying it or embarrassing myself or them. And in my experience, this ballet is played out through multiple trips to Target. There is always one more thing we forgot. One more thing we need to go back to
target to get to make sure everything is just right. You see the more trips to Target and Walmart we get the more time we get to save face and put off goodbye. But inevitably the time comes. When you have the throw pillows, and curtains, and laundry hampers, and easy mac, and storage boxes, and double a batteries, and on and on and there is not one more item either can reasonably think of to save face to put off that goodbye. So then it happens. The goodbye. And the parent starts in a dialogue that half advice/ half prayer. I have taught you well. Make good choices, there is a whole big world out there but now it's your time to fly. “You have brains in your head you have feet in your shoes, you can steer yourself in any direction you choose.” You see the reason this ritual exists, the one that works its way up into this goodbye, is that it is a moment full of love. The love of parent for a child. The fullness of that love. It is the same fullness that I hear today’s Gospel reading. Here in the in-between time. In-between Ascension and Pentecost, we are reminded just how incredibly God loves us. God loves us as a parent loves a child. Jesus is praying the prayer and I can’t help but hear this prayer is as much for Jesus as it is for us. Jesus saying, “Alright Father, I know I have to leave them now, there is no more I can do to put off this goodbye. But it was a good three years. I taught them well. They know to love their neighbor as themselves. They know to love us. They know to go a proclaim this love to all the world. To keep spreading the good news and live out this love in their actions. Most importantly they know that we love them to the ends of the earth and beyond, and there is absolutely nothing they could do or say that could change that. Alright Father, I know that I have to come back to you. But watch after them. It’s a big world out there.” This is how radically God loves each and every one of us, and it takes in-between, liminal times like this to shake off all the extra distractions and get right down to the heart of the matter and to remind ourselves of that love. So now it’s our turn, to go out into the world and preach the Gospel, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, help the poor and suffering. And remind ourselves, each other and the world of the nature of God’s love for all of us. It’s a big task, be we are up to it. And of course don’t worry too much because next week we get that annual holy care package of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.