

Easter 7, May 16, 2021 (Jn 17:6-19; Ps 1; Acts 1:15-17, 21-26) SERMON

Chapter 17 of John's gospel is what we call the *High Priestly Prayer*. Jesus prays to his Father—and ours—not as a mere human, but as the divine revealer of God's loving purpose for his chosen people. The words of this chapter contain promise and consolation, admonition and thanksgiving.

Jesus is with his disciples in the Upper Room, where he's just eaten his Last Supper with them, and demonstrated true servant love by washing their feet. He knows he'll be betrayed—Judas, whose feet he washed, left the room shortly after the footwashing. Perhaps his words here aren't addressed so much to God as they are to the disciples—those other eleven who've followed him more or less faithfully since the beginning of his ministry. Those other eleven who will soon scatter and run.

This prayer is Jesus' way of calling their attention to some basic truths about relationships: the disciples were *given* to him by God and *guarded* by him during his earthly ministry. Now Jesus returns them to God's care and protection as he prepares to take his final leave of them. *Jesus is one with the Father, and he desires above all that the disciples be one with each other.*

There's nothing at all about *faith* or *trust* in this text. Instead, Jesus talks of *belonging* and *living*. The disciples were God's, and God gave them to Jesus, who is one with God. Jesus prays that his disciples may have this same oneness with each other that he has with God, and *that their lives in the world will reflect this.*

Imagine what the world would be like if all who claim Jesus Christ as Lord were united in their faith and witness! What a different world we'd live in! Imagine the power of *actually living in unity* with one another, *living as members of the same body, seeking the welfare of that body and of the world around us!*

What would it look like if Christians would stop looking for differences to criticize and judge, and begin to focus more on the astonishing, self-giving love of our Lord, and on what he taught us during his life on earth. We're all equally indebted to God's death on the cross to take away our sin. If only we could always see *the Christ* in one another instead of the *differences* that drive us apart. *God's oneness with Christ is the same oneness that Jesus desires for us.*

All around us we see the power of sin, and the deceptions of the devil and all his empty promises. Many who say they're Christians live lives indistinguishable from the world around them. Many who say they believe in God and Jesus look and act in very un-Christlike ways.

The bottom line of today's gospel text is about oneness with God and with one another, and about belonging to God. And this is for the purpose of sending the apostles out *to minister in God's name* and to *witness to the truth*. Jesus said to the Father, **As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.**

Do you remember why *Jesus* was sent? **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but in order that the world might be *saved* through him** (Jn 3:16-17).

According to John's gospel, God's whole purpose in becoming human was to "save the world." Not just a few people, but the whole world. For those who believe in Jesus, ***eternal life*** is life lived in Christ right now!

We live ***in faith***, in an intimate relationship with Jesus, *baptized* into his death, *empowered* by the Holy Spirit—and so our life truly *is* different from the lives of those around us.

We live ***in*** the world, but we really no longer belong ***to*** the world. We've been changed, transformed, by the power of God's love, by the sacrifice of Jesus, whose blood washed away our sins. We've been *brought out* of the world's reality *into* Christ. Not to escape from the world, but in order to belong more passionately to life in the here and now, life lived as one with Jesus who is one with the Father.

It's a mystery that has to be experienced to be believed—but it also has to be believed to be experienced. Trust the power of God, and let him lead you into that believing experience!

Jesus says of his disciples, **They do not belong to the world.** We live *in* the world, but we're not *of* the world. Our values, our desires, our very beings, are different, because we've been *baptized* into Jesus' death and resurrection. Lutherans are *sacramental*. The sacraments, baptism and communion, were commanded and provided by Jesus, and we believe they actually change us. So it's possible for us to live differently than the world around us.

Think back to the stories you remember about Jesus. What's he doing in those scenes?

- Maybe you relate to one of the many people he healed—someone who was lame or blind, dead or dying, deaf or mute.
- Perhaps you feel a kinship with someone he *accepted* who'd been rejected by society, one of the outcasts he welcomed or ministered to—a leper, a person of different race or nationality, or someone whose job set him apart from others, like a tax collector.
- You remember the woman he refused to condemn, the one caught in the very act of adultery, when he told the angry people, “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.”
- Maybe you've felt like the prodigal son, who lived in complete depravity and knew he'd never be worthy of forgiveness.
- Or like the forgiving father, who welcomed this son home with open arms, without blame or shame.

You are one with Jesus, just as Jesus is one with the Father. Whatever it is about Jesus' ministry that you remember best, can you hear him telling you to **go and do likewise**? Jesus was sent by God into the world not to *condemn*, but to *save*. Not to tear down, but to heal. Not to bring terror, but to give hope. Not to divide, but to unite—in the same love that unites him with the Father.

We are sent into the world to bring about healing and transformation, to become light for the earth. The Church united could change the world. But even as individual Christians, united with Jesus through baptism and the Holy Spirit, we can undertake a more personal ministry, beginning often at home or at work, loving and helping the people we know best.

Come to the Supper, to the lavish and renewable gift of God's undying love. Receive here strength for your journey, healing for your illness, and hope for your darkness—as well as the power to witness in God's world! **Thanks be to God!**