

## **Seventh Sunday of Easter May 16 2021**

### **John 17:6-19**

This reading in John is the last part of what is called Jesus' farewell discourse. This is the last conversation Jesus has with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. This particular part is known as the "High Priestly Prayer" because of what Jesus does within it. Jesus is facing the harsh reality of death; arrest, beatings at the hands of the authorities, torture it might even be called, a public show trial, and then death on a cross. You might expect him to pray to God for himself. To pray for his protection, or at least help with what is coming. But instead, Jesus prays to God – for his disciples. That God would give them... protect them...be with them.... Jesus stands for us, is concerned with us even when faced with his own harsh reality. And Jesus will do so again. And again. And again. God in Christ is always thinking about us- giving, protecting, standing with.

And we need it, don't we?

Did you hear the repetition of the word "world" in this passage? "The world hated them", "they do not belong to the world." The separation of humanity from God is a strong theme in John. It tends to get played out using this language of "the world". Here the world is referring not to the created universe- the trees, plants, animals, water, grass that God has provided us. Rather it refers to the realm of rebellious humans. The corrupted world of humankind that is always striking out against God. A world that the church John was writing to knew to be dangerous. And that is something that we can certainly relate to, isn't it? The

world can feel like a harsh place to us. From the pandemic to the derecho, to the obvious growing divide in our body politic. From the massive suffering in the Indian sub-continent, to the bloody mess in Israel, Palestine, and Gaza. The steady drumbeat of mass shootings here at home, and the changing nature of our lives right now. We can relate to this view, that the world we humans have created is a place to fear, one that we might even think is out to get us.

It can be debilitating to think about facing that on our own. I don't know about you, but if I had tried to do that over this past year- go it alone- I would have crumbled long ago. I met on Thursday with colleagues, who I had not seen in over 14 months. Colleagues who in this past year have had parents die, their homes and/or church damaged by the derecho, spouses severely injured, a son die and not be able to go to mourn their death because of Covid, and this is just a portion of their personal trials. And these same colleagues have also been walking with their assemblies, trying to navigate decisions that were difficult for even trained medical professionals and scientists, caring for the grieving, the dying, those who were afraid, those who were angry. What got me through this year, what got them through this year, was the fact that we all knew we were not alone. That we had each other's backs- through phone calls, PM's, Zoom meetings and written notes, but also the sure and certain hope that Jesus was always there, with us. Friends, as this passage shows Jesus is always giving- protection, his Word, always guarding us and watching over us. Always.

This is the very nature of God, isn't it? Reaching out, giving, striving, guarding, teaching, protecting. Looking beyond any hurt or offense God might feel to address our needs. God's beloved creation.

Last week, we were reminded that God chose us, we didn't choose God. And in that choosing, we no longer belong to the world. We belong to God. And yet, we are not sent out of the world. Into our own little Christian enclave. To live out our perfect kingdom of God while the rest of the world burns around us.

Instead, we are sent into the world. Just like God sent Jesus into the world so Jesus sends us. Why? That world hates us. We feel it when we live our lives and speak as if we don't belong to this world. When we are voices advocating for the humane care and treatment of migrant children and their families regardless of how they got here. When we feed those who did not "earn it." When we walk with those who are not "normal" or even worse... "sinful".

We are sent into the world for the same reason that Jesus was sent- because God so loves this broken, rebellious, hate filled, wrong headed world God will do or give anything to rescue it. To give it new life. Even sending God's own Son- knowing how they would react but sending him anyway because if there was even just a chance...

And in some ways we are still part of this world, aren't we? This corrupted state that opposes God. Where do we act as if we still belong to the world and not God, and participate in that opposition, that rebellion, and where do we answer our call and make the move Jesus did? A move that allows us even when in our own peril, facing our own grief and pain, to pray for others. To look beyond our needs to theirs. Because that is what Jesus does for us- day after day. And that is what we are called and empowered to do for others. So that they might know the saving power of that presence of Jesus. So that they might no longer belong to the world but to God.

What faith lies behind that? To trust that no matter what, God has your back. Enough to look beyond our own pain and suffering and work for the good of others.

We celebrated the Ascension of Jesus into heaven on Thursday and, like the disciples, we wait. Wait for Pentecost and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit that we might be empowered to go out and serve. Wait to see where in this rebellious world God so loves we will be called to go.

As we wait, let us this week ponder the great love of God in Christ and how that makes our lives possible. Let us ponder what our relationship with the world is. Where are we in the world as followers of Jesus and where are we still of the world? And let us pray together that God would come and increase our faith. Let us cry like the father of the epileptic boy, "I believe! Help my unbelief".

So that when that Holy Spirit comes, we would be ready to answer the call and follow Jesus into this world that God so loved, because God in Jesus has already loved us into life. Thanks be to God!