

WE ARE IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter, 2018

John 17:11b-19

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, John 17:11b-19: **Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name that You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are one!** ¹² **While I have been with them, I have kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have watched over them, and none of them has been lost except the one who will be lost, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.** ¹³ **Now I am coming to You, and I say these things while I am in the world, so that they may have a full measure of My joy in them.** ¹⁴ **I have given them Your Word, but the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world, as I do not belong to the world.** ¹⁵ **I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the Evil One.** ¹⁶ **They do not belong to the world, as I do not belong to the world.** ¹⁷ **Make them holy by the truth! Your Word is truth.** ¹⁸ **As You have sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world.** ¹⁹ **For their sakes I set Myself apart as holy, that they also may be set apart as holy by the truth.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus spoke the words of our text while He was with His disciples in the upper room on the evening before He would die on the cross. Judas was not with them, because the devil had entered his heart, and he had since left the gathering and was on his way to betray Jesus to the authorities. Jesus had pretty much finished teaching the disciples, and now He was almost ready to go to Gethsemane where He would be arrested and led away to be crucified.

Knowing that His disciples were about to experience three of the scariest and loneliest days of their lives, Jesus had one last thing to do before they left for Gethsemane, and that was to pray to the Father on their behalf. John chapter 17 is referred to as *Jesus' high priestly prayer*, and the Gospel for today is part of that prayer.

When we read through this prayer, we are taught much about Jesus' attitude towards us. As this is the evening before His death on the cross, we would certainly understand it if Jesus was completely focussed on His suffering and death. After all, having His human nature, how could He not think about suffering and dying in agony? Yet Jesus' only concern was not for Himself, but for His followers. While in Gethsemane He would pray for Himself, but right now, in that upper room, before they would leave for Gethsemane, Jesus' prayer was for those who would feel so alone and so frightened during the coming days - the days of His gauntlet of sorrow, suffering, and death - the days of His wait in the tomb. He prayed for those who would hide behind locked doors until they see Him face-to-face after His resurrection.

The high priestly prayer of Jesus is for us as well. Although Jesus has never left us, He has taken His *visible presence* away from us. He has ascended into heaven and although He is with us, we cannot see Him. He has not yet come to take us into our eternal home, so we find ourselves in a time of waiting for Jesus to reveal Himself. We are in the time of "Now, but not yet!" He is with us now, but we cannot yet see Him with our physical eyes. He has given heaven to us now, but we cannot yet experience it as we will in eternity. All of Christ's gifts already belong to us now, but we cannot yet experience them to the fullest. Thus, we live in the time of now, but not yet. Jesus' prayer is for all those who wait in the world of now, but not yet.

While we live in the tension of the now, but not yet of the Christian life, we also live in the tension of being in the world, but not of the world. We are like resident aliens - people who reside in one country but are citizens of another.

One of the problems we have is that, even though we are aliens in this world, we expect to get along with it. We expect to prosper in a world that is not our

home. Some will even tell you that one of the advantages of becoming part of God's family, is that everything will start turning up roses. You will become wealthy and more attractive. Your relationship with your spouse will blossom and your children will rise up and call you blessed. Your health will improve, and you will have more energy. This deception will tell you that God wants nothing but material and social prosperity for you. This deception tells you that worldly success indicates a *superior standing* with God.

Jesus has a different teaching. In His prayer, He prayed, **I have given them Your Word, but the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world.** That does not sound at all like prosperity! Because we are resident aliens in this world, the world is out to get us. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, constantly confront and attack us in a never-ending battle to lead us away from Christ.

Sometimes the attack is direct. History is full of people who have been put to death because of their faith. That continues even today in some countries.

Other times, the temptation is more subtle. The evil forces in this world use enticements and pleasures to draw us away from God. There is the deception that makes a sin seem so harmless, so good, and so desirable at the time. While we consider the temptation, everything looks good and pleasant. This has been a weapon of evil from the very beginning in Eden: *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* (Genesis 3:6). Temptation always seems like a good idea at the time. It would not be tempting if it didn't.

This world is a world of sin. Whether we are citizens of this world or citizens of heaven, we will sin while we live in this world. Even we who are bound for heaven must complain with Paul, "*I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing,*" (Romans 7:19). We are saints in God's eyes for Jesus' sake, but we continue to sin. We are in the world, but not of the world.

The people of this world operate on a spectrum of beliefs when they deal with sin. At one end of this spectrum are those who have deceived themselves into believing that they do not sin. This typically involves a dilution of God's justice. They either tone down God's Law to the point they can keep it or they get rid of it altogether. A good example of this were the Pharisees of Jesus day. In spite of the fact that they studied the Scriptures constantly, they interpreted the Law in a way that made it doable. They saw the Law as something they could actually keep. They made keeping the Law into an external activity designed to impress men so that they would become objects of praise for their good works. In reality, they were in denial about their true status in the eyes of God.

At the other end of the spectrum are people like Judas. Judas is an example of despair. Judas did not deny his sin at all. He understood that he deserved punishment. In his case, the evil forces of the world convinced Judas that his sin was more powerful than God's forgiveness. Instead of repenting and asking for forgiveness, he hung himself. Evil used the great sin of despair to push Judas over the edge and into the abyss of eternal punishment.

The people of this world stand all along this spectrum. Some are quite proud of their own righteousness. Others don't really care. Still others destroy themselves in despair. Eventually, they will all stand before God and realise their mistake, but it will be too late.

When the Holy Spirit works faith in us so that we place our trust in Jesus Christ, a new way opens before us. Our citizenship is no longer in this world. Instead, it is in heaven. We live in this world as aliens. When the forces of evil overwhelm us, and we sin, we have an ambassador with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The Holy Spirit has given us the sight to see our sins and mourn our inability to keep God's Law. He has made known the reality of the punishment that our sins deserve. However, instead of driving us into despair, our sin drives us to Jesus Christ. The depth of our sin shows us the height of His love - the love that sacrificed itself on a cross in order to free us from the guilt of our sin - the

love that revoked our citizenship in this world and made us citizens of heaven. By the Holy Spirit's power, we do not deny our sins, but readily confess them before God. By the Holy Spirit's power, we find ourselves offering God the highest praise as we beg, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*"¹

Jesus prays for us. In His high priestly prayer, He prayed that the Holy Father will keep us in His name. In this way, we will have, by grace, the unity that the Father and the Son have by nature. As we look at the words that Jesus used: **Holy Father, keep them in Your name**, we see that Jesus' prayer is a variation on the beginning of the prayer He taught us: "*Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name.*"² As we listen to Jesus' prayer, we learn that the closer we are to the Father, the closer we are to each other. When the Father keeps us in His name, then we are at one in Him.

How did Jesus keep us in the Father's name? His prayer tells us that as well. He prayed to the Father, **I have given them Your Word**. He kept them in the Father's name by teaching them the Father's Word.

He still works that way today. Martin Luther said that very thing when He explained how we keep God's name holy among ourselves, in the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer: *God's name is kept holy when the word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, lead Godly lives according to it. Help us to do this dear Father in Heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this Heavenly Father!* It is God's Word in Divine Service, in Bible Studies, and in family and private devotions that keeps us in the Holy Father's name. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to revoke our citizenship in this world and establish and maintain our citizenship in heaven.

Jesus, our great High Priest loves us so much! When any normal person would be concerned for *his own* upcoming suffering and death, Jesus was

¹ Luke 18:13

² Matthew 5:9

praying for us. He was praying that we would remain in the Holy Father's name by the power of His Word. He was about to go to the cross in order to make it so that we would be in this world, but not of it, and He prayed to His Father to keep us that way. May the Lord's will be done for us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, our light and our salvation, we praise You for Your love and pity to all people. But we praise You especially for giving us Your only Son Jesus Christ, who has ascended in triumph to Your right hand and sits at Your right hand with all other authority subordinated to Him. We thank You for crowning Him with glory and honour because of His obedient life, His innocent suffering, His redeeming death, and His resurrection. You have made Him king over all and Lord of all things for the benefit of the Church. Grant that we too may continue to confess Him as Lord of our hearts and our only Saviour.

Enable us through Your Holy Spirit to understand and know the things that belong to Your eternal kingdom. Comfort and strengthen us by Your heavenly truth. Stir our lives by Your Spirit, so that we may be ready to forgive others, love others as brothers and sisters, and be willing to help others generously and cheerfully. Keep us watchful and prayerful, so that we may not fall into temptation. If need be, give us the willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake. When testing comes, help us through Your Spirit to stand firm and steady, always busy in our work for You.

Renew all who serve in Your Church by Your gracious, powerful Spirit, that Christ may be consistently confessed, His cross uplifted, and His Gospel proclaimed as the only power that saves. Give grace and power to all pastors and missionaries, and warm love to all Your people, so that all may use their varied gifts to Your praise, through Jesus Christ.

Bless all parents, that they may give a good example to their children and encourage them in faith, godly living, daily study of Your Word, and a life of service to You and to all people.

Pour out Your Spirit on our nation, that our people may live in peaceful and pious homes, and may serve You in all godliness and honour. Give Your blessing to all who work with mind or hand, that they may do their tasks honestly and conscientiously,

and receive both satisfaction and a proper reward for their service. Give true wisdom to all in government, that they may perform their duties in ways that please You.

Hear the prayers of all in trouble and suffering. In the quiet hours of the night when there is no one to share their burdens of pain, loneliness, and worry, give them Your strength and hope, and assure them of Your love, power, and constant presence.

We give to You, heavenly Father, and your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and to the Spirit of glory and of peace, all the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 1:12-26

¹² Then they went back to Jerusalem from what was called “the Mount of Olives,” which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ When they entered, they went to the second-floor room where they were staying. There were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew; James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas, the son of James. ¹⁴ With one mind these all kept praying together, along with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the disciples (the number of persons all together was about a hundred and twenty) and he said, ¹⁶ “Men, brothers, the passage of Scripture that the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about Judas had to be fulfilled. He served as a guide for the men who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For Judas had been counted as one of us and had

received his portion in this ministry. ¹⁸ With the reward that he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field. He fell headlong and burst open in the middle and all his intestines poured out. ¹⁹ All those who live in Jerusalem have heard about it, and so that piece of land is called ‘Akel-Dama’ in their language, that is, ‘Field of Blood.’ ²⁰ For Scripture has said in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his home be deserted and let there be no one who lives in it!’ and ‘Let someone else take his position of oversight!’ ²¹ Therefore, there must be one of the men who have accompanied us all through the time when the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² one of these men who have been with us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day when Jesus was taken up from us, to be a witness with us of His resurrection.”

²³ They proposed two men: Joseph, called “Barsabbas,” who was also known as “Justus,” and Matthias.

²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, You know

the hearts of all. Show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take over the position of this ministry and office of apostle, from which Judas has transgressed, to go to his own place!”

²⁶ They cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias, and he was chosen by vote to be added to the eleven apostles.

1 John 5:9-15

⁹ If we receive the testimony of human beings, the testimony of God is greater, because this is the testimony of God, which He has given about His Son. ¹⁰ The person who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. The person who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given about His Son. ¹¹ This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. ¹² The person who has the Son has life. The person who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³ I am writing these things to you that you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask for anything according to His will, He

hears us. ¹⁵ If we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we also know that we have from Him the requests that we have made.

John 17:11b-19

^{11b} Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are one! ¹² While I have been with them, I have kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have watched over them, and none of them has been lost except the one who will be lost, that the Scripture may be fulfilled. ¹³ Now I am coming to You and I say these things while I am in the world, that they may have a full measure of My joy in them. ¹⁴ I have given them Your Word, but the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world, as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask You to take them out of the world but to keep them from the Evil One. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Make them holy by the truth! Your Word is truth. ¹⁸ As You have sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For their sakes I set Myself apart as holy, that they also may be set apart as holy by the truth.