

Sermon for May 16, 2015

The Gospel of John has some wonderful verses in it, but I'll be honest with you if I wasn't the one reading this; my eyes would have glazed over by the third verse! So let's figure out what's going on here. We're again back to the Thursday evening before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus knows that he won't be with the disciples much longer and he is praying to his heavenly Father for them and for us. Today I want to look at three important parts of this prayer and promise.

First of all the world can be a difficult place. That doesn't sound like much of a promise or even good news, but it is the truth. It's important for us to know the truth when there are so many voices in our society telling us that if we just buy the right product or read the right self-help book our lives will be just peachy-keen!

But life doesn't work that way and church needs to be where the pretending stops and we're honest with each other. Our lives are wonderful one moment and painful the next; beautiful for a time and then more difficult than we can sometimes bear. Jesus knows that his leaving will be extremely painful and challenging for the disciples, so he tells them the truth—there is evil out there and it will come after you.

Which leads us to the second important part—Christianity doesn't provide an escape from life's difficulties, but rather offers support to succeed amongst them. Jesus continues praying, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." How much easier it would be, we think, if Jesus would just take us out of here, but that's not the promise that Jesus

makes. Jesus asks God to support and protect us against all the evils of the world. One understanding of the Christian faith is that faith gives us the ability to keep our footing amidst the difficult, painful and shaking world. That's what Jesus promises us—not that we won't have struggles, but that we won't be alone in those struggles.

So why not take us totally out of this world? Because we are here for a purpose—to care for this world God loves so much. But if the world is full of evil, why should we care for it? Because this same painful and difficult world is the one that God loves so much that the Father sent the only begotten Son to redeem it. We are sent into this world to bear witness to the truth that God loves the whole world, even when the world lives differently than God plans or desires.

Jesus asks God to sanctify us—to make us hallowed or holy; set apart in order to serve the world. It doesn't matter if we are at home or at school or at work or where we volunteer. It doesn't matter if we've been out in the world for a long time or if we're just starting like our graduates. The question for us as Christians is never whether God will put us to work, but rather how God will work through us.

Think of the days ahead for each of you and imagine how God can work through us to make this world a more trustworthy place. It might be through being a good friend, a good listener, or by standing up for someone who is vulnerable, by doing an exceptional job at work, or by volunteering to make a difference or praying for those in need, or even by inviting someone to church who needs to hear about God's abundant love for all of us. God is at work in and through all of

us each and every day for the sake of the world God loves so much; inviting us to take part in God's unfolding plans for the future!

As we go forth into this world day after day let us pray: Dear God, whose love knows no ending, we know this life is beautiful and difficult and sometimes both at the same time. We do not ask that you take us out of this world, but that you support and protect us while we are in it. We pray that you would set us apart in the truth we have heard here, that your love is for everyone, and we ask that you would send us out from this service to bear witness in word and deed to your grace, goodness and love. May we hear your voice calling us at home and at work, at school, our social settings, and the places we gather and volunteer, that we might feel and share your love. We ask this in the same name of Jesus, the one set apart and made holy for us. Amen.