

John 17:6-19

Jesus prays for his followers, the ones to whom he has revealed God's name and God's word which is truth. He prays that God would keep them safe, would make them one as he and the Father are one, and would make them holy in the truth.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

COCU38B.Easter7B Readings

This is the last Sunday of Easter (the week before Pentecost). The readings seem to be rather disparate, but two themes emerge. The first is the call to holiness. In Acts, the apostles seek to complete their number again in order to continue Christ's work effectively. In Psalm 1 the righteous person is praised and revealed to be one who bears fruit and who is truly blessed. In John's letter, the holy person is shown to be one who receives God's testimony about Jesus and who receives life from Jesus. Finally, in Jesus' prayer in John 17, Jesus asks that God would keep his disciples safe and would make them holy through God's truth in God's word. The second theme is that of unity with God and with one another, which flows out of the call to love of the previous few weeks in the Lectionary. In Acts, the unity of the apostles is extended to include the new appointment of Matthias. In Psalm 1, the righteous person is one who rejects the company of the wicked but who, unlike the wicked, finds a place among the company of the righteous. In John's letter, believing in Jesus as the one who brings life connects us with God and in Jesus' prayer in John 17, Jesus prays for the unity of the disciples with one another even as he is one with God. In the end, these two themes merge and become one, because it is in our union with God and one another that true holiness is expressed and lived. It is wickedness that divides and separates, while holiness (which John Wesley defined as perfect love) unites and joins and creates community. The message of the Lectionary this week, then, is for us to embrace the life that God gives us in Christ and allow it to bring us into loving communion with God and with others.

In the quest for global justice the idea of "holiness" may seem out of place and irrelevant. But when we think of holiness as a sharing of the life of Christ in unity, we discover that the quest for holiness leads us right into issues of justice. As we seek to connect and share life with others, we inevitably find ourselves seeking to address the causes of inequality and poverty, we work for power sharing and collaboration, and we recognise our connectedness, which leads us to seek the best for all people. In addition, we discover our connectedness with all life, resulting in a greater awareness of our need to care for creation. When holiness is about sharing life in community, the quest for holiness becomes inseparable from the quest for justice – the two are really synonymous. As we strive for holiness, then, we will find ourselves reaching out to one another across the lines of ideology, religion, race, nationality, education, and economic station. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 1

Those who love God's instruction and refuse to join in the company and works of the wicked are truly happy and bear fruit, while the wicked are ultimately destroyed.

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Acts 1:15-17,21-26

Peter suggests that the disciples should find a replacement for Judas, so they select two candidates and draw lots, and Matthias is added as an apostle to join the other eleven.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus - for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

1 John 5:9-13

God has testified about Jesus that life is in him, and whoever has God's Son has life eternal, so if we believe God's testimony, we have this life.

If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Christians throughout the ages have tended to hold some kind of prejudice or another toward those "outside" the church. In 1 John, the distinction seems clear enough - those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God have life, those who don't believe don't have life (1 Jn. 5:12). Similarly, the reading from John 17 sounds like the Christians were under attack from the outside world. The "world" was something from which one had to protect oneself. For the most part the Christians for whom the Scriptures bearing John's name were intended lived in Asia Minor - modern day Turkey. Toward the end of the 1st Century, these Christian communities were under mounting pressure - both from the outside as well as from within. They felt their very existence was threatened. So it's no wonder that they looked at the outside world as something dangerous. They even viewed former members of their communities to be a threat because they disagreed over the question of Jesus' identity as human and divine. While it's understandable that a community feels threatened, it's important to remember that taking Scriptures that were intended to address a specific situation and lifting them out of context to apply them to our day and time can be a risky venture. In a very real sense, it can enable the "oppressed" to become the "oppressors." There are all kinds of examples throughout the history of the church where that was exactly what happened - Christians took Scriptures like these and used them to justify all kinds of hateful and even violent acts against those deemed "other" and "outside." But the very Scriptures themselves point us to a higher road. The biblical narrative that on the one hand suggests the "world" is such a threat to the Christian communities also clearly speaks of the "world" as the object of God's redemptive love in Jesus Christ. In fact, in the same prayer that expresses concern for the Christians due to the threat of the world, Jesus also speaks of sending them out into the world just as he was sent into the world (Jn. 17:18) (*Commentary by Alan Brehm, The Waking Dreamer*)