

Our gospel today is a portion of what is known as Jesus' priestly prayer. He prays this prayer after the foot washing and before the soldiers come to arrest him. He is commissioning his disciples, asking his Father to recognize that they also belong to God. Jesus is saying that he has done a good job in calling these disciples because they now believe in him as the Son of God.

The disciples will need the protection of the Father as they try to share the love that Jesus has shared with them, the love that reflects the love between the Father and the Son. Jesus' concern is easy enough to understand given that people who preach love are just as easily reviled and persecuted as they are accepted. But it's not the physical danger that Jesus is speaking about it is the danger of drifting away, abandoning what he has taught them about what it means to be in community or in John's terminology, to be one, to be one as Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus is not talking about loving the world in this moment, he is referring to the bond that the disciples must share, the love in which they will find strength, and courage, and renewal through each other through him. We remember what he said earlier in that evening, *'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you' (John 15:9). 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you' (John 15:12). 'I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another' (John 15:17).*

When Jesus speaks about the world, he is alluding to the influence of what he will name as the evil one, perhaps we could say the sin that affects all our lives. It's not that the world itself is evil...but we have done a marvelous job of screwing things up from what God intended. Jesus frames those who reject belief in him as "the world", that same world that will reject the message that his disciples will share as they continue his mission.

Jesus asks God that the disciples be sanctified in truth as he has sanctified himself. To be sanctified is to be set apart for a special purpose, to be made holy, to be in the world but not of the world. For Jesus and the disciples, sanctification comes through going out into the world and glorifying God, as Jesus himself has glorified God.

In the very next verse that is not part of our lesson Jesus prays, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." (John 17:20) And if we follow that line through the next 2,000 years, Jesus' prayer applies to us.

In baptism we have been buried with Christ in his death and by it we share in his resurrection (BCP pg 306). We have been set apart to prepare for living out our lives in such a way that we are in the world but not of the world. This does not mean that we shut ourselves behind closed doors, associate only with those who think and believe as we do, and eschew the beauty of creation and the joy of being alive. It means that we try to live into the special grace that we have been given by the Holy Spirit in baptism. We pray, we read scripture, we take God's commandments seriously, especially Jesus' commandment about love. We try to live as Christ lived in obedience to God finding freedom, and the courage to risk speaking the truth of God in Christ. The world frequently has other ideas some of it is blatant evil that we can all agree is to be condemned but there is also the gradual corruption of conforming to the mores of society - which we can call pernicious evil and that is harder to see and even harder to resist.

For example, we used to set aside the 4 weeks before Christmas as a time of preparation, of waiting, waiting for the coming of Christ in glory as well as the birth of the Christ child. But instead, our waiting for the coming of Christ Advent has been hi-jacked by retailers' needs to put out the Christmas stuff after Halloween, to blare jolly Christmas songs that focus on Santa rather than Jesus, and basically make it difficult to sustain the somewhat anticipatory, somewhat penitential, nature of Advent. Regretfully, I say this as someone who enjoys the blitz and the cart-before-the-horse celebration as much as anyone.

Another example of how the world undermines our spiritual lives is the breaking the boundaries around Sundays as a day of religious observance. Children's sports and activities that are scheduled for Sunday mornings force the choice between worshipping God or participating in activities that are important for a child's integration into society. Admittedly that horse has left the barn and it is too late to close the door on that one, furthermore, you might not even find it to be evil.

More dangerous is how we as Americans have merged God and nationalism. When we promote the idea that God has given us this country, that is, God has given it to those of us whose families have emigrated from Europe, we ignore the cost to the Native Americans whom we displaced and the millions of slaves that we brought over from Africa whose labors were important in building our country's wealth. This country, this country that we love is not God's special nation. This nation has accomplished many great things, not the least of which is espousing radical ideas about equality, freedom, and justice, all through the blood and sweat and tears of our forebears; and it has done some very bad things, sometimes in the name of God which is a perversion of God's will. God loves God's creation equally and Jesus is not on our side except... except when we try to do his will.

*'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you' (John 15:12).*

Therefore, what we do we are to do in love, not in fear, not in anger, not in disgust, but in love. This love includes how we treat people, how we speak about people, and how we support and protect those in need. In commissioning the disciples Jesus has commissioned us, Jesus has prayed to God for our protection, Jesus has shared with us the benefits of his death and resurrection, and he has invited us into a life of sanctification, of being made holy.

May we all be up to the challenge.

Amen.