

May 13, 2018 Seventh Sunday of Easter
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GOSPEL

John 17:6-19

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the seventeenth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus prayed:] ⁶“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. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And 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. ¹²While 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. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ. Today, Jesus prays for us. He prays that we will go out into the world with a shield of protection and a powerful purpose...protection and purpose grounded in our identity as the ones who belong to God.

I had a friend who asked me once to describe what it felt like to come back home to Chicago, where I lived for three years...He asked, when I was coming back from somewhere else, what was the moment I knew I was back? Where was the boundary between being away...and being back again...? For some it might have been a glimpse of the skyline...a certain road sign, landmark or milemarker...For me it was when I saw my first blue line train in the median of I-90. Once those boxy silver cars pulled up alongside me, I knew I was home.

It's that feeling of crossing an invisible boundary... There's no difference between the air on one side or the other...but you can feel that something changes... when you are home... or when you leave it... when you come to a place of fear... or of wonder...

I think our lives are full of boundary crossings like that. Even the boundaries between countries, which seem to matter so much are mostly invisible and intangible until some points them out, marks them, or makes something of them.

Where do you go in your life, where you can feel the difference between one state of being and another, even though it's invisible to everyone else?

John's gospel today, makes me think especially of those boundaries between our safe, healing, home places...and "the world out there"...full of uncertainties...where we become unsure, anxious or afraid.

We know, of course, intellectually, that everywhere we ever go is part of "the world," we also know what it feels like to be in "the world" that isn't where we are at home...in contrast to the places that are such an outward expression of our deepest truths and loves... that they are somehow substantially...truly...(if you like fifty-cent graduate school words...then ontologically) different...from everywhere else. "The world out there" is a place from which we have certain retreats, or at least most of us do...and I think we need them.

Those are the places where you can be who you really are...Those are the places that *help* you be who you are...and *believe in* who you are...

Today, Jesus continues his words of farewell to his friends which we also heard last week...which Jacob preached about...when he told us how Jesus is trying to help his friends be ready for what will happen when he can't be with them anymore...by claiming them as the ones he chose before they could ever choose him...and reminding them that if they abide in love, they will find strength and peace and wisdom. After speaking those words to them, today he prays for them...and he does it out loud...in front of them... He wants them to hear what his prayer for them is. Because he knows that right now they are safe at home...but they won't be for long.

At this moment in their journey, with Jesus about to go to the cross, the disciples are at the threshold of the invisible boundary between their place of certainty and safety...in the presence of Jesus...and having to go "out there"...to the places beyond where they can easily remember and believe in who they are.

Jesus knows how hard it will be (even if they don't yet)...and he wants to send his friends out with the truth of their beloved-ness to him and to God to keep them safe.

Today, Jesus prays...that his followers will go out into the world with a shield of protection and a powerful purpose...protection and purpose grounded in our identity as the ones who belong to God.

Jesus knows that there are places where God will feel farther away...or where we will begin to forget ourselves... Sometimes we feel it happening, suddenly, and it's frightening. Other times, it happens slowly...so slowly we hardly realize it until we look up and see we are lost.

It's like the eruption of Kilauea on the island of Hawaii... Have you seen the videos of the lava flow? The volcano has been erupting...with slowly slouching flows of molten rock engulfing everything in their path...You can see it slowly

swallow homes and cars...and then there are the huge new fissures opening in the ground, spraying white-orange heat into the air. There is nothing you can do but get out of the way. On the island, they are trying to be prepared for an eventual sudden and violent explosion from the volcano's mouth, too. The way in which destruction arrives is uncertain...but it presses in...and it can happen slowly...or all at once.

Sometimes, it even feels like destruction comes from inside of us...maybe less like a volcano and more like...oak wilt lives and moves through a tree for years before the evidence is seen. Sometimes we decay from the inside out.

The world can feel like a dangerous place. The world is a dangerous place.

So, Jesus is praying fervently today...that in the midst of danger, evil or destruction...we will be strengthened in the knowledge of who we are.

Jesus wants to put the shield of truth around his friends before they are sent out...the truth that from the beginning of time, we have carried within ourselves the very image of God...Today Jesus gives us our identity as a gift, a protection, and also a charge...because to go out into the world knowing we are God's children is not just so we can be insulated from harm by an impenetrable shield. It doesn't work like that, of course. We know that too well...We aren't sent out into the world just to survive it. There are others who need protection and love, too. So we are sent out from God's presence with protection...but also with a purpose.

Jesus was sent into the world to be truly part of it...to bring holiness and love and justice into the very places that are being claimed by destruction and suffering...to come so close as to touch it...to reclaim everything God made from harm.

Going out into the world in the knowledge of who we really are...is going to mean going out into the world to live in the legacy and continue the work that Jesus began in us... and that will mean resisting the powers in the world that will try to tell us and others differently...

Sometimes that will be as simple (and as difficult) as standing against those things that harm God's children and God's creation in our everyday lives...even when it is frightening or inconvenient...speaking out against harmful words and actions that we witness, reaching out in love even though it makes us vulnerable to rejection...

Sometimes it will be as complicated as trying to unravel the hidden webs that hold us in complacency and self-centeredness...questioning the very furniture of the universe and asking why we are willing to believe that some problems are too big to fix...from all the -isms to climate change to war...

Sometimes it will mean making things complicated that we wish were simple. Like something as seemingly sweet as Mother's Day...which we can take at face value...and lift up as a time to honor those called to motherhood. And that is a good thing to do, but if we stop there it is at the cost of erasing the stories of those who wish desperately to be mothers but aren't and grieve today...as well as those who didn't want to be mothers...but are...those who have had difficult or traumatic relationships with their mothers or children...or who have a mother or child who has died. What about the women who aren't called to be parents, and feel like their whole womanhood is discounted because of it? What about mothers whose motherhood doesn't look like a TV commercial...step-moms, foster moms, mothers who have adopted their children or given their children to be adopted. There are women today, joyfully and anxiously expecting their first child...women in the midst of the holy work of mothering that they love, even as it challenges them as deeply as any other calling in life. And there are so many others whose stories we might not hear if we aren't interested in being honest about how complicated life is...Sometimes when we are sent out into the world trusting that we are children of God, it is so we can pull at the loose threads in overly simplistic stories so everyone can hear the good news that they have a place inside the story of God's people...when the story of the world has written them out.

Jesus prays for us today...because he knows that being his disciples means that we are being sent out...away from the places where our heart is at home and

we know who we are...into a world that creeps with the destructive crawl of a flow of lava...or the insidious poison of oak wilt...or the bleak darkness of simply feeling erased. Jesus is sending us out because others need to know as much as we do that the poison, destruction, and shadows don't own them. Jesus is sending us out, now, as his resurrected presence is coming to end on the earth...so we can continue the work and proclaim the power of life and love and justice over anything that might try to separate anyone from the love of God and each other.

May we go out today wrapped in the power of Christ's prayer, to live in the truth of who we really are...God's beloved ones...so we might be brave to live out this good news for all those in the world that need it. So be it. Amen.