

**John 17:6-19 (New Century Version)**

<sup>6</sup> "I showed what you are like to those you gave me from the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your teaching. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you gave me comes from you.<sup>8</sup> I gave them the teachings you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew that I truly came from you, and they believed that you sent me.<sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for people in the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours.<sup>10</sup> All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And my glory is shown through them.<sup>11</sup> I am coming to you; I will not stay in the world any longer. But they are still in the world. Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they will be one, just as you and I are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and only one of them, the one worthy of destruction, was lost so that the Scripture would come true.

<sup>13</sup> "I am coming to you now. But I pray these things while I am still in the world so that these followers can have all of my joy in them. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your teaching. And the world has hated them, because they don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world.<sup>15</sup> I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to keep them safe from the Evil One.<sup>16</sup> They don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world.<sup>17</sup>

Make them ready for your service through your truth; your teaching is truth.<sup>18</sup> I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. <sup>19</sup> For their sake, I am making myself ready to serve so that they can be ready for their service of the truth.

**This is the Word of God and it can be trusted  
Thanks be to God.**

When you hear the word, "World," what do you think of? For me, I think of the many science fiction films and series I have enjoyed over the years; like Star Trek, Battle Star Galactica, Buck Rogers and even Stargate. In each of these story lines there are many adventures that lead the cast to various places, planets and solar systems. They visit worlds with different species from our own; differing life forms, customs and beliefs. I remember one world visited by the crew of Star Trek's Voyager contained a culture deeply rooted in mathematics, but yet had never developed anything remotely resembling music. Going against all that the Prime Directive instructed of them, their doctor introduced them to the joys of music. They were overtaken by what he had introduced to them, so much so that they began to

demand performances from him. He became important to them, a cultural icon, someone they could not live without.

Then, as they began to study the harmonics and intricacies of musical form, their mathematics evolved it into something far beyond anything that the doctor himself could have even imagined. He had considered staying on this world, leaving the crew for the fortune and fame that the people of this world were offering him. However, they quickly forgot about the doctor; he was cast aside and rejected for the newer more evolved musical form they had developed.

How true is it also of this world, the one we call our home. Fashion, fads and people are raised up each and every day only to be forgotten and placed aside later. The world offers us many things that we believe we cannot live without, only to later reject those for something newer and seemingly better. Remember the Macarena; parachute pants or Mili Vanili? All something we thought we couldn't live without at one time, but have managed to comfortably replace with something newer and seemingly better; like body armor, blue ray disc players and Britney Spears.

This world . . . our globe . . . our Earth . . . our endless universe, all that we know is contained in our surroundings and we are a constant influence on this world and lives of those around us in as much as this world and those around us are a constant influence on us. In the gospel reading today, we hear the word, "world," thirteen (13) times. So we ask ourselves, what purpose is there for such emphasis on the world in Jesus prayer to Father? What is our relationship to be with the world around us? But before we continue, let us pray that our God will provide us with guidance and direction during the message today. Let us pray.

*Dear Heavenly Father:*

*Once again we find ourselves in your midst and are again amazed and bewildered at your teaching. As we gather today, open our hearts, ears and our minds that we may learn more about you and our relationship to the world around us. We thank you and praise you for in the name of Your Son Jesus.*

*Amen!*

In the gospel story, Jesus teaches us in three distinct instances about prayer. Each Sunday following the Prayers of the People, we pray together the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . ." It is a prayer that breaks through denominational boundaries and rest deeply within the hearts of many Christians, regardless of the backgrounds and doctrinal teachings.

Second we have the prayer that Jesus taught us as he prayed from the Garden of Gethsemane. It was in the Garden that Jesus began to contemplate the nearness of his death and the pain and suffering that we would endure as a sacrifice for our sin. "Not my will, but yours be done . . ." This prayer is one that we have learned by example, rather than direct teaching. Jesus did not instruct us to specifically pray in this way, but as believers we are inspired to pray for God's will in our lives and the lives of those closest to us. By persistently seeking acceptance of the situations we find ourselves in, however nasty or upsetting that they may be, we begin to accept God's will in our lives, rather than pushing for our own will to be done. It was once said that,

“We do not pray so that God might hear us, but rather we pray so that we may hear God!”

In today's lectionary reading we find our third prayer inspired by the Son of God, Himself. The prayer is referred to as the High Priestly Prayer and is an example of intercessory prayer. Jesus was interceding for his disciples, he was praying for them. In following the example of Jesus we too intercede to the Father in prayer and pray to him for the well being of others. We do so each Sunday during Prayers for the People. We also offer an opportunity for prayer at the end of each sermon and we pray for you during our time of Communion, as together we partake of the body and blood of our risen Savior, Christ Jesus. During all of these times of prayer, we are praying for one another; I for you, you for me and idealistically you are each praying for one another.

However in today's reading, this is not the case. In today's reading we have none other than Jesus himself who is praying for His Disciples and though not directly in this reading, He is in turn praying for me and you. Who is praying for you in important and

what is being prayed for is equally important, especially when it is Jesus.

Amongst the words of Jesus prayer for his disciples, we find three important reasons for the words that Jesus prays; they are unity, protection and sanctification.

Jesus asks that the Father keep them in *unity*. Though Jesus is going away and is no longer to be a part of the physical world, his followers are to remain. "I will not stay in the world any longer." Jesus prays, "But they [that is the disciples] are still in the world" (v. 11). They have already been told that they are to carry on God's command to love one another and to remain in His Word. If they are faithful to do these things, then He has promised to remain in them through the power of the Holy Spirit; whose manifestation came in great power and exaltation on that first Pentecost Sunday when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Disciples; appearing as tongues of fire.

Second, he asks that the Father to *protect* them. Jesus stressed that His Disciples no longer belong to this world and because of that, trouble will come to them. Notice, however, that

his prayer of protection is much more specific than that of the world in general; the world and all that is within it is innately good; being created by the Father. However, as we discussed briefly last week, there is a power upon the Earth that has a tendency to run amuck, creating distraction and despair; inherently attempting to draw people outside of the will of God. Here in Jesus prayer, that power to distract is referred to as the *evil one*. Though it is natural to want to run away when we are frightened or threatened, it is not His desire that we do so. Rather, Jesus prays to His Father, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to keep them safe from the Evil One" (v. 15). Our God is faithful and just to protect us and to remain in us if only we obey his command and remain in His Word. More simply stated, we are to enter into relationship and reconciliation through the promise of salvation given by Christ and we must seek to foster that relationship by loving one another and remaining in His Word.

Jesus prays for His Disciples to be protected because they are in the world but no longer of it and as such they will face

much hostility and the rage of the evil one. In the face of that truth, however, Jesus doesn't simply pray for protection, he prays too for *sanctification*. That is, He prays that His Disciples would be visibly set apart for God and God alone; that the Father would mark them out as His and demonstrate that ownership of which Jesus spoke when he asked, "Make them ready for your service through your truth; your teaching is truth. I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. For their sake, I am making myself ready to serve so that they can be ready for their service of the truth (vv. 17 – 19).

God's will, declared in His Word, has the power to set people apart for God, to call them out of the world in order to belong to Him. We are called to be set apart from the world, set apart for God. I once heard gay man attempt to describe his thoughts on why the world rejects so passionately and with such emotion the GBLT community. In his words, he stated that it was his belief that when many straight people today hear the word gay or are faced with acknowledging a same sex couple, all they can concentrate on is what their sexual being; i.e. their intimacies

behind closed doors. And why shouldn't they? The media portrayal of the GLBT Community often concentrates on the flamboyances of gay culture portraying gay men as sex crazed animals and lesbians as men hating feminists. How many here today, gay or straight, have allowed themselves to fall prey to worldly pleasures, time and time again, without a moment of hesitation to think about the consequences of their actions; to stop and consider who they may be hurting.

We are called to be set apart from the world, set apart for God. Being gay is not being of this world. Being gay does not keep you from being set apart for God. Being gay is not a sin. Being gay will not keep you from enjoying the rich blessings that God has to offer you and prevent you from participating in God's will for your life. Being of this world, however, is another story. If we choose to reject God's love and to reject all that he has for us, then how can we set ourselves apart for Him.

Jesus prayed for His Disciples. He prayed for the unity, their protection and for their sanctification, that is that they be visibly set apart for His glory. Likewise Jesus has prayed and is praying

the same for you today. God is offering each of you today a place in His Kingdom, a place in His plan. It is His will that we all be unity, that we worship together as a community of faith and that we are here for one another. It is His will that we are protected against the evil one. The evil one doesn't always come with a hockey mask or razor blades on its finger tips. The evil one is full of deception; in fact he is a master of it. Street corner preachers who scream hell and damnation to everyone they encounter without a taking moment to extend the love that Christ commanded; open and affirming churches who promise to love everyone (to love all) only to drive away those who they fail to understand are still loved by God regardless of mistakes they may have made; as well as those who preach against the GLBT Community under the guise of hate the sin, love the sinner are as much a part of the road blocks and misdirected detours of our lives as any addiction or desire to purposefully reject the love of Christ.

It is my prayer that today you will do two things: (1) accept that you are who God has ordained you to be; an imperfect

sinfully natured individual who is worthy of the grace and love of Christ Jesus and (2) that you will come to find relationship and reconciliation with God our Creator, Christ Jesus our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer. Who you love should not define you as a person; rather you should be defined by how you love and in whose love you share. Open your heart today and ask Christ in. Don't hold back. Stand to your feet, fall to your knees or stay seated right where you are, but please don't leave here today without knowing who you are and whose you are!

Amen.