

Dr. Hugh Hamilton
Trinity Presbyterian Church – Pensacola, FL
May 16, 2021

THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

John 17:6-21

Our scripture reading from John's gospel, chapter 17 is known as his "High-Priestly Prayer" which he prayed at his last supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. With great affection and compassion, Jesus first prays for himself; then for his disciples, then for future believers, i.e., for you and me.

In verses 1-5 Jesus prays for himself that he may glorify God by accomplishing his mission to secure our salvation and that we may come to eternal life by knowing God in Jesus Christ.

In verses 6-19, Jesus prays for his disciples that they may be faithful in their mission to witness God's salvation to the world and that God will sanctify them in the truth and keep them safe from Satan.

In verses 20-26, He then prays for believers who will be reached by the disciples' witness and then the witness of believers down through the ages, one generation after another. That's us!

Jesus prays for us, for you and me. How humbling is that? Hebrews 4:14-16 states that Jesus intercedes with God the Father in our behalf. *"Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (NRSV) Isn't that incredible good news? When we come to God with our requests, Jesus is alongside us, interceding in our behalf.

Don't be afraid to approach God or to ask God's forgiveness and help. Though you've done wrong and deserve God's judgment and hope to escape God's discipline, you need not be afraid of God – because Jesus stands alongside you, giving you comfort and confidence. With Jesus you can come to God as any child can come to a loving parent. You are not an outsider, a stranger to God, you are God's child; God knows what you need and can supply what you need. Tom Long writes, "In our secret, whispered prayers, we are known so well that God, like a mother listening with her heart to her children, can finish our sentences." (Long, 2). God loves you and intends good things for you!

God can and does enable us to live according to God's ways, not by the ways of the world.

One of the most famous lines in this prayer is verse 16: *"[My disciples] do not belong to this world, just as I do not belong to this world."* What does that mean? And how does that impact our unity?

Basically, it means that we don't buy into systems of this world. As followers of Jesus we live in tension against worldly ways and systems. The gospel of Jesus calls us to embrace our present reality, while also straining toward a more just and generous reality. We are not to separate ourselves from the world or from diverse people, but rather, Jesus calls us to live by a different set of standards, a different reality; we are to live attuned to GOD's kingdom in the midst of our society, and to contribute to the transformation of our world.

Poignant Quote: Bob Goff recently posted to Instagram: *“Don’t let being right talk you out of being kind.” “Don’t let being right talk you out of being kind.”*

We are so divided by political hatred and rudeness, divided by mask vs no-mask arguments, divided by spiteful rhetoric over cultural issues, that I think we need for refresher course in civility.

I am disturbed by Facebook posts by my friends and by Trinity members that express hatred of political leaders and people who support their views – both Republicans hating Democrats and Democrats hating Republicans – with a sweeping generic denunciation of anyone who disagrees with you demean them, you write them off, you hate them and will not allow anything good to come from them. I do not want to see those posts from you or to know those things about you, so I have chosen to unfriend some of you and to block some of you. Amidst the tension I hear the tune, *“...and they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”*

Don’t conform to the ways of the world: Don’t be greedy or selfish, don’t be resentful; don’t manipulate people, don’t hate people of other races or religions or nationalities or sexuality or socio-economic levels. Don’t label people and stigmatize them by your bias or prejudices. Don’t give up on people or social conditions or excuse yourself with phrases like, “What can I do? I’m just one person!” or “That’s just the way it is. It’s always been like that.” Jesus’ prayer reiterates that how God does not intend us to live that way and that world conditions don’t have to continue to be that way – you can help change it. At least you can show others a better way.

Jesus prays that his joy may be made complete in us. Joy does not mean giddy happiness; joy is deep rooted security within that allows you to have hope no matter what. Joy is not running away from the systems of the world, the ways of this world, nor always combatting the systems and people controlling them; but it does mean witnessing to others the better and higher ways of Jesus. That is not easy, but Jesus does not pray that it would be easy for us or that we would be taken out of the world, insulated, isolated. Instead, Jesus prays for our protection in the world and from Satan’s evil ways.

Our protection is not found in escaping or avoiding people and systems. We neither give up or conform. Instead our lives are transformed. We live according to God’s ways and we reveal God’s system for the world: we witness love, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, wisdom, courage, generosity, fairness. Our protection is being made Holy which enables us to endure the conflict and to work toward acceptable outcome.

We can’t be content just to appreciate Jesus’ prayer for us. We must try to live, act, and work with God to become the answer to Jesus’ prayer. We are to shape our lives to be like Jesus and to treat people as Jesus did. It is not enough to say “Amen!” to Jesus’ prayer – we must become the “Amen.”

The real issue is not what’s out there in the world, in the ways of the world, in the worldly systems, but what’s in here...in our hearts! Will we choose to operate out of worldly systems that oppose God’s life; do we operate out of self-preservation, winner take all, “get out of my way!” systems and attitudes of prejudice, fear, hatred...or are we willing to change, to BE changed by God’s grace? Do we deny God’s ways and contribute to the darkness of this world or shall we contribute light into our world, to show others the beneficial ways of God in contrast to the Satan’s evil ways in this world?

Jesus prays for our protection and entrusts us to the God who saves us, makes us holy, and sets us apart from the world to show God's better ways!

Jesus prays for us, for all who believe on his name. He prays for our unity: that we become one with God and with one another, and that our unity makes us **stronger and more loving!**

A pastor having dinner in a restaurant happened to sit next to a young couple. He began to talk with them about their religious experience, how they felt about religion. They were a deeply committed young couple; they loved the Lord very much. They talked about their concern for Christian unity and how in Jesus Christ all of us have been made one.

The woman reached into her purse and took out a card. She said that it was a portrait of Jesus that illustrated the meaning of Christian unity in a powerful way. Her card was very wrinkled. Obviously, she had had it for a long time and had looked at it a great deal. When looking at this picture at arm's length, you could see an ordinary picture of Jesus, but if you held it up close, you could see that this portrait of Jesus was composed of forty-eight different faces. And there were all kinds of people: they were young and old, black and brown and yellow and white, male and female, all kinds of human expression were right there in that painting. (Kidd)

Jesus prays for our unity, so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus into our midst. **Our unity in Christ and our acceptance of others in the world is our primary witness to the world of God's reconciling and renewing love revealed in Jesus Christ - he who reconciles us and prays for us.** *"May they also be in us,"* Jesus prayed to God, *"so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

Do you remember the song "We Are One In The Spirit"?

"We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored."
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." (Scholtes)

To witness to Christ, you must love your neighbor as Christ loves you.

Being united and compassionate, loving one another, we begin to invest in one another.

We help one another and serve one another.

We teach one another and influence one another.

We pray for one another and listen one another.

We seek out the goodness in one another and bring out the best in one another.

We are about one another, not show contempt for others.

That is slow and tedious and tiring...but the cumulative result is worth all the love and heartache and joy and satisfaction.

How you think and act and treat others is an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Our Amen is not just a word, but in actions.

Offer people forgiveness instead of retribution

Show people compassion not contempt

Show mercy rather than condemnation.

Show faith and hope, not cynicism.

Choose unity rather than isolation.

Pursue God's ways, not your personal agendas.

In so living you become the Amen, your heart is healed, your soul is fed, and you make a lasting difference in the world. Amen!

Sources

Long, Thomas J. *The New International Lesson Annual 2014-2015: September 2014 - August 2015* (Kindle Edition).

Kidd, Dr. James L. <http://www.lectionarysermons.com/AdvKidd-1.html>.

Marsh, Michael K. "A Lived Amen." May 20, 2012. <https://interruptingthesilence.com>

Robertson, Brandon J. "The Ways of the World." *Lectionary Sermon Series, Vol 2*, Jessica Miller Kelley, Editor. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019.

Scholtes, Peter. "We Are One in Spirit." Copyright 1966, F.E.L. Publications, assigned to The Lorenz Corporation, 1991.

\05-16-21 *The Ways of the World.docx*