

Homily for Easter 7, 2021

John 17:6-19

'In, but not of, the world'

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TEXT – John 17:14-19

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.

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INTRODUCTION (310)

In recent years I read a memoir of a Lutheran woman who grew up in the 1800s in South Australia and personally knew Pastor Fritsche,
One of the first two Lutheran pastors from Germany to first settle here.

She writes about how she admired Pastor Fritsche,
And learnt so much from him.

One day as she was walking past the little church building she noticed Pastor Fritsche was in there alone,
But she could hear sounds coming from inside,
So she decided to spy on him and eavesdrop on what was going on.

She writes of how moved she was by what she saw and heard.

Pastor Fritsche was praying,
Praying for his flock,
Praying for their protection,
Praying for the young people in his congregation of whom this lady was one.

It was one thing to converse with Pastor Fritsche,
To hear him teach and preach,
Those were vitally important.

But it was another thing to hear the prayers of his heart poured out before God.

In a way,
This is what we get to do with our Lord Jesus in this text.

Up to this point in John's Gospel we have had recorded for us several chapters of Jesus' teaching to his disciples on the night before he died,

But now we have something different,

We have Jesus' lifting his eyes to heaven and praying to his Father,
And we get to listen in.

So what does he pray for?

Well too much to cover in one sermon.

But for today we'll notice three particular aspects of it,
All to do with the relationship between Christians and the world.

First, he prays for the protection of his disciples as they're not **of** the world.

Second, he prays that we're sanctified as he sends his disciples **into** the world.

Finally, he consecrates himself as the sacrifice **for** the world.

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PROTECTION AS NOT OF THE WORLD

So first,

Jesus is very clear that as his disciples live their lives in this world,
There will be problems.

Earlier in his teaching he had said,
'In this world you will have troubles,
But take heart,
I have conquered the world!' John 16:33

He says this is particularly because his disciples do not **belong** to the world,
They're *in* the world,
But they are not **of** the world.

And this is connected to Jesus having given his disciples the Word of the Father:

'I have given them your word,' Jesus prays,

*'And the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world,
Just as I do not belong to the world'.*

He seems to be saying,
That as you hear the Words of Jesus and live according to them,

It will be evident that you are motivated by something different,
Striving toward something different,
Characterised by something different,

And in this fallen world which is turned against God,
Hostility will naturally arise from this against disciples of Jesus Christ.

In conversation with some of you,
I'm aware that this is a reality many Christians are becoming more acutely aware of in our time.

I've shared one way of thinking about this from a commentator I read which some of you have
told me has been helpful...

This guy says,
That in the last thirty or forty years,
We've lived through a big transition in how Christianity related to the world.

Up until about 1990,
To be a Christian or someone who basically held to traditional Christian values,
Was basically seen as a positive thing.

Through the 1990s and 2000s,
It was seen as basically a neutral thing.

Whereas in the last 5-10 years,
It's moved to being for many people, a negative thing.

Now of course like all categorisations this is an over-simplification,
It's much more complex than this,
And doesn't hold everywhere.

But as I said,
As I talk with members and share this,
It's something that resonates with a lot of people.

So what's the response then?

It can be tempting to want to withdraw.

But notice Jesus prays very clearly on this point,

Father,

¹⁵*I am not asking you to take them out of the world,
but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.'*

Jesus recognizes that life for his disciples in this world will be difficult at times,
But his answer is not to remove us from the world,

Instead as you face difficulty and hostility and even lose friendships or employment or social status
because you follow him and keep his Word,

He prays that you are kept safe from the evil one,

He prays that what happens in the world will not undermine your faith,
Will not lead you to despair and to give up,

The Son of God,
Our Saviour,
Jesus Christ,
Is at the right-hand ***interceding for you***,

And as you are in this world with all its problems,
He prays to his Father for your protection.

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SANCTIFICATION AS SENT INTO THE WORLD

Next, Jesus prays that his disciples are sanctified, or made holy,
Or consecrated,

As he sends them ***into*** the world.

¹⁷*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*

¹⁸*As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*

So on the one hand,
Jesus acknowledges that the world will hate his disciples because they keep his word.

He acknowledges that the evil one is profoundly at work in this world so that his disciples need his
prayers of protection from this evil.

And yet,
On the other hand,

All this does not mean Jesus gives up on this world and the people in it.

Far from it.

And it's not only that he reluctantly agrees to let us stay in the world and not remove us from it,

He is intentionally **sending** his disciples into the world,
Just as his Father send him into the world out of great love for it,
In order to save and redeem it.

So how does this happen?
How are you made clean and holy?
How are you set apart for holy service in the world?

How is the Church prepared to participate in God's great missionary activity in this world?

Well, interestingly,
Not by what we do,
But by God's word which comes to us.

What is baptism? Water only?
No, the Word of God in and with the water.

What is the Lord's Supper? Bread and wine only?
No, the word of God with the bread and wine.

What do we read as Christians when we gather for worship?
What do pastors preach and teach?
What do we encourage families and individuals to use at the centre of their family life?

The Word of God.

Because this is what God uses to cleanse us and make us his holy people,

This word has power,

It does something to us,
Unlike any mere human words do.

this Word shapes us and how we think and how we see the world,
this word sanctifies us.

Just notice how strong this statement is,
It's not just that Jesus says Father, your word is true,

But your Word is truth itself.

It's a higher claim.

Jesus is saying the word of God is the central source of truth for us by which all other claims to truth are measured.

One thing of St Paul's words in Romans 12,

*'Do not be conformed to this world,
But be transformed by the renewing of your minds' (Rom 12:2).*

This word forms us into his people who are sent into the world and are not conformed to it,
But having been transformed,
Can now be transformative in the world for the sake of others.

In a very real way you can see Christian worship as doing what Jesus is praying for here.

We gather together to be cleansed, made holy,
Renewed and transformed by the Word of God,
Through the power of the Spirit.

This is of central importance.

But what happens at the end of the service when you receive that final blessing from the word of God?

You don't stay here,

You are sent out,

Sent out into the world as holy people,

Sent out into your daily vocations to serve,

Sent into your homes,
Your places of work,
Your school or University,
Your neighbourhood,
Your sports club, your gym,

We are sent out with to the world which so dearly needs the salvation Christ Jesus brings.

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CONSECRATION AS SACRIFICE FOR THE WORLD

So Jesus prays for his disciples *protection* because they're not **of** the world.

He prays for his disciples to be made holy as he sends them **into** the world.

Finally, he prays that he himself would be consecrated as the sacrifice for the world.

Jesus prays,

¹⁹*And for their sakes I sanctify myself,
(Or I consecrate myself),
so that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

To sanctify or consecrate something in the Old Testament was to cleanse and purify it,
And to set it aside for holy service.

So the priests were sanctified and consecrated,
The furnishings in the tabernacle and temple were sanctified and consecrated,

but there was another thing,

the sacrifices.

In this prayer Jesus prays as our great High Priest,

But as John the Baptist proclaimed about him right back at the start of this Gospel,
He is also the '*Lamb of God,*
*Who takes away the sin of the **world**' (John 1:29).*

This prayer is the last recorded words we have of Jesus in this Gospel before the events of Good Friday begin.

Jesus looks ahead to his suffering,
His crucifixion,
His death,

He knows this is the mission for which his Father has sent him into the world,

And he prays,
'Father, I consecrate myself for this...

*I set myself apart for this holy service,
Of laying down my life,
Before I take it up again.'*

And this is the ground and source of everything else!

Why can you be sure that Jesus' prayers for your protection in this world will be heard and effective?

It's because he died for your sins,
He shed his blood,
He gave his life,

And in his resurrection and ascension,
He now lives to intercede for us!

Why can you be sure that his word will sanctify you?
How can you be confident in being sent into the world as his holy people?

It's because in his death and resurrection he has already conquered the world,
Driven out the ruler of this world – the evil one,

And it's the crucified and risen Lord Jesus whose word makes you holy,
And empower your service in the world.

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CONCLUSION

So that's our little peak through the door,
At how Jesus prays.

For our protection as we're not of the world,

For our sanctification as he sends us into the world,

And as our sacrifice for sin,
And not only for us,
But for the sins of the whole world.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**