

Year B Easter 7 2024 John 17:1-3, 6-21 Jesus Prays for His Disciples

The foot washing is over, supper has been eaten, night is here, and Jesus prays a long prayer for his disciples. Today's Gospel reading is a part of that prayer. Jesus prays earnestly and extensively for his disciples because he knows what's coming. This prayer is at the centre of John's Gospel – Jesus is right on the edge of a turning-point...and because Jesus is on the edge, his disciples are right there on the edge with him even though they don't know it yet.

They are about to witness the horrifying betrayal and agonizing death of their beloved teacher and friend and Jesus is preparing them. In fact, throughout this Gospel, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for this moment. He has told them repeatedly who he is through his "I AM" statements...I AM the bread of life...I AM the way, the truth, and the life...a deliberate echo of God's words to Moses when Moses asks God his name...I AM, God tells him. Jesus has told his disciples that he will not leave them orphaned, and he has instructed them to abide in his love.

Today, he is summing it all up for them, pulling things together and giving to them his farewell words of advice...This Gospel intentionally leaves out the name of the disciple who is "writing" this story, instead just calling him, "the beloved disciple", because we are meant to insert ourselves into the story. We, too, are there, listening to Jesus' final powerful words of protection and instruction as he prays for us to his Father.

An important phrase pops up several times throughout Jesus' prayer... "not of the world", he keeps saying. He is not of the world. His disciples are not of the world. We are not of the world. It might be tempting to think that this means we don't belong in the world because we're going to die and go to Heaven. That is not

what is going on here. We are a part of the beautiful world that God created. He created the earth, the sky, and the sea. He created the animals, the birds, every creature...and he created us – one among many of God’s creatures. God created all of these things and “He saw that it was good.” We are a part of that.

We are not a part of the greed, the hunger for power, the importance placed on social status. We are not a part of the world’s structures that oppress, that abuse, that keep poor people poor, that destroy the environment...When John writes, “the world”, he means all that is wrong in the world, the brokenness created by humanity that does not belong in God’s kingdom on earth. We belong to God’s kingdom and are not a part of the wrongness of the world.

Well, we’re not supposed to be a part of that world. It is really hard not to be tangled up in that world when we’ve been shaped by it. And, you know what? So were the disciples. The disciples were tangled up in the economic and social class structures of their time and place. They followed rules that kept people divided into categories...poor people/rich people, sick people/healthy people, Roman conquerors/conquered Jewish people...power was in/meek and lowly were out.

Jesus had been patiently but passionately showing his disciples for the past few years how to break down those divisive rules, how to turn them upside down and upset the status quo. And Jesus was about to do the ultimate power flip. The Jewish religious authorities and the Roman Empire...the most powerful of the earthly powers...were going to try to kill him and he, one solitary man, was going to defeat them.

He wasn’t going to defeat them in the way the world would have him do it. He wasn’t going to rally supporters around him and fight them... although he could

have. He wasn't going to try to talk his way out of it with winning arguments...although he could have. His way is different. His way is God's way and that way... is love. Jesus lays down his life in love.

The powers of this world weren't expecting that. They were expecting angry words, a physical fight, push back of some sort and instead, they got love. Jesus defeated the power of sin and death with the perfection of his love.

God so loved the world he sent his son to us. Jesus so loved the world, he died for us. God so loved the world that he raised Jesus to new life. Jesus so loves the world he shares that new life with us. That new life is eternal life. Perhaps you noticed that Jesus tells us today what eternal life is: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." This is eternal life: that they know you, that they know Jesus Christ. Eternal life is knowing God. I'd like to bet that if I had asked you to give me a definition of eternal life, yours would not have matched Jesus' definition. You may have told me something like: Eternal life means that you'll live forever, you'll never die. People tend to think of "eternal life" and "being immortal" as the same thing. Living forever with God is one of the fruits of having eternal life but it isn't what eternal life means. "Eternal" is a quality not a quantity. "Eternal" (aeonios) is the quality of the time – the age or aeon – in which we live. And those who know God live in a God-infused reality right now. When you read or hear the words "eternal life" in Scripture, the focus is not the future but the quality of your life in the present. You have eternal life right now – a God-infused reality.

And then Jesus drops a bomb on them: "As my Father sent me, so now I send you." Why send us? John's Gospel explains that God sent his Son to us so that the world could be saved. The well-known passage, John 3:16, tells us that God sent

his Son into the world to save the world. Those who believe in Jesus as God's Son will have eternal life. As my Father sent me, so now I send you. Clearly, we are being sent in the same way as Jesus to do the same thing as Jesus. Well, we can't die on a cross to defeat the power of death and darkness. Besides, that only needed to be done once and Jesus did it. But Jesus said, we are being sent into the world to save the world just like he was. Unless we understand what that means, we may think that we simply must believe that Jesus is God's Son who died to cleanse the world from sin and we must tell other people this so that they can believe this and be saved too. That's not what Jesus is telling us to do.

To believe (the Greek word "piste") means to place ourselves wholly in God's care, to completely trust and rely on God for all things and above all things. Salvation means wholeness – the total wholeness, healing, and well-being of body, mind, and soul that comes from fully placing ourselves in God's care – abiding in God as God abides in us. This passage tells us God and Jesus share everything in totality because they are totally one, abiding in love. Jesus prays that we will gain that unity among ourselves as well – to be one as they are one: total reconciliation with God, with planet, and between all people. That's is the goal continuously before us. As we learn to become one, abiding in God's love we are sent into the world to show others how its done and invite others to join in. We are sent into the world to save the world: to bring the healing wholeness found through trust in God. "As the Father sent me, so now I send you."

He knows it's not going to be easy...resisting the powers of this world that are so firmly established, untangling ourselves from broken structures, turning accepted categories upside down and erasing the things that divide us...that got Jesus killed and he knows he's not passing on an easy task to us. Not to mention, we hardly

feel qualified to transform the world – we are still so imperfect, getting to know God and each other, learning how to love as God loves.

That is why Jesus prays so earnestly for us in this prayer...He prays for our protection and learning by asking God to sanctify us. Sanctification means to be made holy and that has two pieces to it. To be holy means to be dedicated for God's use, set apart for God's use. And to be made holy is to become more and more like God as shown to us in Jesus. With God's free gift of grace – the free gift of God's loving kindness – Jesus sends us out into the world, knowing we will become more and more sanctified, more and more like him as we grow in the understanding of our faith, strengthening our relationship in God and in God's ways, as we continuously remain aware that we must set ourselves apart for God's use. Sanctification separates us from the usual operating systems of the world and transforms our lives. We live according to God's system – his kingdom, in other words - and we reveal God's system to the world in acts of mercy, forgiveness, beauty, wisdom, generosity, and underpinning all of this is love.

I draw your attention to the fact that, at the end of Jesus' prayer, there is no Amen. Amen means, "So be it" or "Let it be as you said." Today we might say something more like, "Yes, we agree with you, let's make it happen." So, in times of prayer when people are gathered together with one leader praying on their behalf, when the leader is finished, the people answer with a resounding, "Amen!" "So be it!"

So why is there no "Amen" here? Because we are the people gathered around listening to Jesus pray for us. We watch as he breaks the boundaries of social class, we listen as he teaches the great commandment to love, we hear him as he

prays to his Father to protect us with his grace and sends us out. We say, "So be it". We live the Amen.

Our liturgies are our training ground, our classroom. We gather from out of the midst of God's kingdom not yet fully revealed on earth. We gather here to encounter God through Christ in the perfection of his kingdom that already exists. We gather to be moulded into the one body feasting at his banquet table as we are meant to be. But we always gather to be sent. We are sent to reveal the healing wholeness we are experiencing, to reveal the holiness we are learning, to gather more people to experience and learn with us. One body, in healing and holiness, saving the world, living the Amen.

"As my Father sent me, so now I send you." It is for us to add the Amen.