

Year C Easter 7 So *That the World Will Believe* John 17 vv20 to 26 and Rev 22 12 to 14, 16 to 17, 20 to 21

This Gospel message is messy and repetitive but this is very typical of much of what John writes. John very deliberately repeats – making slight variations each time – in order to explain more fully and draw us more deeply into the meaning of the text. Sociology and linguistics experts call the type of writing that we find in John’s Gospel “antilanguage”. And they say it is the language of “antisociety”. It is language that provides an alternative and resistance to the dominant culture around us. It is language only fully understood by the people in the community using that language. That means that we can feel like outsiders as we hear or read John’s Gospel because it can be hard to make sense of it. But John is making an important point so it’s worth the effort to wrap our minds around what he’s saying.

One of the things that this “antilanguage” of John does is to take a word and give it a different meaning. We actually do this all the time. Young people are particularly notorious for doing this like taking the word “sick” and using it mean that something is totally awesome and amazing. John takes the words “glory” and “glorification” and uses them throughout his Gospel to refer to the arrest, torture, and death of Jesus. In our minds there is nothing glorious about being whipped and spat on but, for John and others in the know, that is all part of the glory given to Jesus. There is a lot of meaning packaged up in that one small word “glory” and this can cause problems. When you have a word being used in a way different from what we expect, and this word has a lot of unspoken meaning behind it, this

can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, especially as time passes by and the people who gave the word its new meaning are long dead.

But there is one unmistakable concept included in the “glory” of Jesus that we hear about today: oneness. “Being one” is repeated in various ways – about 11 different ways just in the few verses we heard today – but also throughout John’s Gospel. There are a multitude of phrases like “believing in Jesus”, “following” him, “abiding” or “dwelling” in him, loving Jesus, keeping his word, receiving him, having him, seeing him – they all capture the idea of being one with Jesus.

Jesus has been talking of his oneness with the Father throughout the Gospel: He does his Father’s work according to his Father’s purpose. But now he extends this oneness to us. His prayer for us makes it clear that he is asking God the Father that we be drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity. He also tells us why he is giving us the astounding gift of becoming one with God. It’s such an important reason that he says it twice: That the world may believe that you have sent me. So that the world may believe.

The “world” in John is another word he has redefined. The “world” refers to all that opposes Jesus – the people, the systems, the powers, ideas, behaviours that hinder and work against God’s purpose. God loves us and everything that he created and desires to mend all of the brokenness because God’s purpose is, of course, nothing less than the total reconciliation of people and planet with him and with each other. The never-ending supply of countless leaves on the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations, that we heard about last week, tells us that God’s healing wholeness is for everyone. So, Jesus prays for the world. The goal is

to bring all things into oneness with God because when you are one with God, you have the abundant wholeness of life in God's kingdom.

This all-inclusive, open invitation to everyone is what we hear today in the reading of the Revelation to John. "Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has provided us the way into life in God's kingdom. "Adored by God are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates," Jesus tells us. The "robes" is a reference to the baptismal garment. Everyone in the early Church wore a white robe when they were baptized. And the "washing" – we hear elsewhere that the robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb – the washing means that in baptism we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection...plunged into his death and lifted up to new life, given the glory of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit so that we are seen by God as his righteous children, one with God.

As God's children, one with God, we have the wholeness of life in God's kingdom that we heard about last week. We are in that wonderful place, bright with the light of God's love, where nothing broken may enter, where God dwells among us. Of course, there is still too much of the world's brokenness cluttering things up but we are being drawn ever closer to the fullness we hear about. We have already accepted the invitation to enter but the offer is still open for the rest of the world around us.

Did you notice who it is who is issuing the invitation? The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." The Holy Spirit is constantly on the move, constantly working toward the fulfillment of God's purpose. And the Holy Spirit does a lot of that work through

us. The bride refers to us – the Church. We are the ones to issue the invitation: come to the waters of life. And then the people who hear this invitation and accept it are the next ones who then issue the invitation so that there is a constant stream of invitations to come to the water. “Come and see,” is what we say. “Come and see for yourself. Come and experience God for yourself.”

Now, if we are inviting people into God’s kingdom we are also inviting them out of something else. That something else is the “world” – the thinking and being that opposes God. In John’s Revelation, the world opposing God is the empire of Rome. Although we are not ruled by Rome we are still very much ruled by an empire. The dominant message of the global north is that we are moving as a culture toward increasing wealth and technological control and that this is good. In the book *Colossians Remixed*, Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmat write: “The average North American person is confronted every day by somewhere between five and twelve thousand corporate messages, all geared to shaping a consumer imagination...Some of us wear these messages on our shoes, our jackets and our shirts. The messages are all telling the same story: a finite world can sustain infinite growth, economic growth is the driving force of history, consumer choice is what makes us human, and greed is normal. If we live in an empire, it is the empire of global consumerism” (p.84-5, *Colossians Remixed*). “In spite of the evidence that increased industrialization and technology lower the standard of life rather than raise it,” the progress narrative is the driver and legitimizer of our lifestyle (see p.62 and footnote 31 of *Colossians Remixed*). Consumerist thinking is such a part of our lives that we don’t notice that it’s crept its way into our thinking in other areas: we talk about buying an argument, getting more bang for our buck, the bottom line, and so on. This is the talk of a society based on the thinking that

power comes from property, position, and pocketbook. We are meant to untangle ourselves from this way of thinking and being and live God's way of true power: of love, serving, of mercy.

This is a very hard thing to do when you're immersed in the culture that works against the ways of God's kingdom. The Church, though, is the sign, the foretaste, and the instrument of God's kingdom. Here is a poem, based on an ancient poem found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, in which we hear that Christ holds all things together:

And this coherence of all things is socially embodied
 in the church
 against all odds
 against most of the evidence
 In a "show me" culture where words alone don't cut it
 the church is
 the flesh-and-blood
 here-and-now
 in time and history
 with joys and sorrows
 embodiment of this Christ
 as a body politic
 around a common meal
 in alternative economic practices
 in radical service to the most vulnerable
 in refusal of the empire
 in love of this creation
 the church reimagines the world
 in the image of the invisible God
 (p.87 of *Colossians Remixed*, based on Col.1:15-20).

As the Church, the body of Christ in the world, working toward the fulfillment of God's purpose, let us remember that all things are possible with God. When we change, the world will change along with us. When we say, "come to the water," others will join the chorus. "The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Let us be one with each other as Jesus and the Father are one so that the world may believe.