

**The Ways of the World**

May 16, 2021

**John 17: 6-19**

<sup>6</sup> "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup> for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me.

I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I 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. <sup>15</sup> I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

## Ephesians 1: 15-19

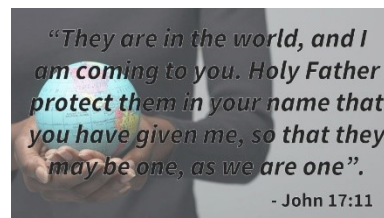
*<sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup> so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.*



This morning we work from two passages that are encouraging and uplifting. Both stand in contrast to the ways of the world. Both seek God's protection and

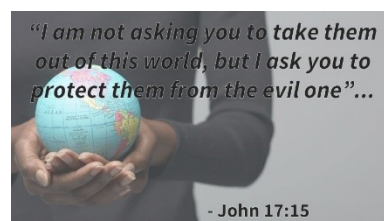
guidance as we, the followers of Jesus Christ, try to navigate this world as we seek to love and serve the Lord our God. The prayer we find in John 17 comes at the end of Jesus' ministry as he is preparing to walk the road to the cross. Jesus expresses great love for his disciples and followers, to protect them as they are sent out into the world to continue the work of building the kingdom of God. In our passage from Ephesians Paul also prays for the believers, seeking God's wisdom and guidance to accompany the "*immeasurable greatness*" of the power found in the name of Jesus. Both of these passages underscore the idea that we do not belong to the world, but we are in the world to be the incarnations of Christ for all. Continuing last week's call to serve and love all of God's creation and all of the people we meet, this morning we celebrate our call to be living witnesses to the power of Christ. As we begin, let us pray...

As we begin this morning, turn with me to John 17. Here, in verses six through eight, the themes of Jesus teaching the disciples all they need to know from God and of giving them everything they need to continue the ministry are developed. As Jesus nears the heart of his prayer, he recognizes the disciples as *"those who you gave me"*, signifying that they belong to God and not to the world. To me, verse eleven is the heart of Jesus' prayer. Here he prays, *"They are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one"*.



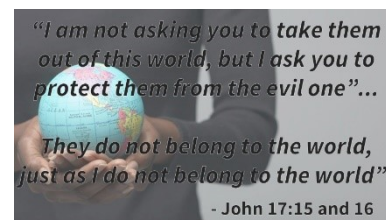
Jesus will soon depart this world, but the disciples will remain. Jesus knows that the road ahead will be difficult, so he prays for God's protection and for unity in the community of faith. When he was with them, Jesus protected and guarded his followers; he brought unity. Without him, though, Jesus knows they will need divine support and protection. In verse fourteen Jesus reminds the disciples that he has given them God's word. In speech and action, Jesus taught the disciples the ways of God. The Spirit will preserve and help the followers of Jesus to remember these words, equipping them for their encounter with the world.

After recognizing that the world will hate the disciples just as the world hated Jesus, he prays, *"I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one"*. The mission requires that the believers remain in the world. The work of building the kingdom of God will continue after Jesus ascends into heaven.



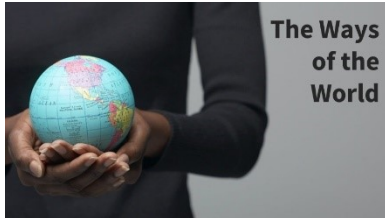
When John the Baptist was proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and Jesus himself both stated that the kingdom of God was drawing near. Jesus did not simply leave heaven behind and come to dwell on the earth for a time. He came to bring the kingdom of heaven more fully to earth. Too often we think heaven is up there and hell is down there. The truth, though, is that both are a part of our world now. All Christians are to be a part of building the kingdom of God here and now. Satan works to counter this effort. But for the disciples and for all of us who follow in Jesus' footsteps, despite the trouble and persecution that will come, the work of transforming the world will continue on. Satan stands opposed to this work and strives to rule the world. Jesus asks God to protect the believers from Satan's attacks and lies. It is a good reminder that we are not ever alone.

Continuing in verse sixteen, Jesus reiterates, *"They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world"*. This reality is our reality as well. We belong to



God. We simply live in this place for a time. Ultimately our home is with God in eternal life. We live in this tension. The gospel always places us in a place of tension. As we are in the world, we must embrace our present moment and reality. Yet we must also always be looking towards and working for a more just and generous reality. Contrary to the customary way that the Jews, the chosen people, lived – separate from the world around them – and contrary to the preference of many churches and Christians, Jesus calls us to be in the world. Yes, Jesus calls us to live by a different set of standards, to live a different rhythm of life, to live a different reality. The kingdom of God that Jesus calls us to is not a single place somewhere on this earth or even to the new earth that

will one day be created when Christ returns. No, Jesus calls us to transform this world into a more loving and just world – a world that God designed and desired to see manifest today.



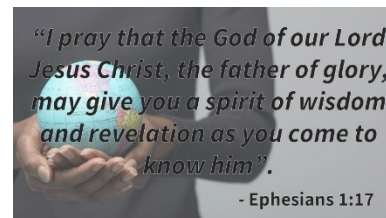
To manifest the kingdom of God here and now, on earth as it is in heaven, first requires that we reject the ways of the world. We must see and live beyond the me-first, selfish, and prideful ways of the world. We must reject the “American dream” notion that all should strive for more and more wealth, status, fame, possessions... We must not buy into the lie that these things bring us happiness or peace or joy or meaning. Instead we must find our meaning and purpose in this world as people who seek to serve, who work for justice, who value the other above self, who believe and live like we matter and can make a positive difference in this world and in the lives of those we meet. These core teachings and practices of Jesus are radically different than the accepted ways of the world. When we practice these Jesus ways, we live in but not of the world.

Even though Jesus rejected the norms and ways of the world and continues to encourage his followers to do so today, Jesus prays that the disciples and that we would be sent into the world, not kept from it. Jesus does not want us to isolate ourselves from the world, to hole up behind our sanctuary walls, to ignore all that is going on in the world around us. Quite the opposite – Jesus wants us to be sent out into the world, to live as a contrast to the ways of the world. We are called to live “highly questionable lives”, lives that draw others into this new and different way of seeing and living in the world.

This all sounds very challenging doesn't it? So then, what makes it possible for us to live in the world but not be of the world, to live in a way that differentiates us and our way of life from the world, to live in a way that draws others' attention in a positive and meaningful way?

Turn with me to Ephesians 1 as we continue and begin to answer these questions. In our second passage, Paul speaks of the power and the spirit that we receive from the Lord. Addressing the church in Ephesus, Paul begins the passage by lifting up their faith and love of the saints. There is a connection between faith in Christ and loving God's people. Personal faith brings salvation and salvation is expressed, above all, by a life of love. Because of their great witness to God's love, Paul continually prays for this church. It was and remains important to cover the work of the church in prayer.

Look at verse seventeen. Here we see what Paul prays for: *"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him"*.



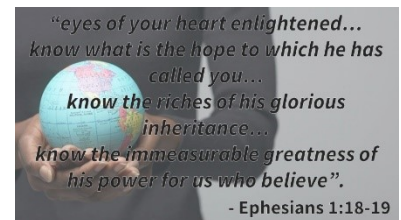
A spirit of wisdom and revelation is important for the church and for individuals within the church. First, our knowledge of God is both experiential and intellectual. One fuels or feeds the other. Both are essential because being in the world but not of the world can sometimes presents barriers to sharing the good news with others. Divine wisdom helps us as we seek to share our faith with others.

This wisdom is necessary because when we are trying to share the good news of Jesus Christ with someone who is not like us or when the church is trying to develop new ministries or outreach opportunities, sometimes we find ourselves on foreign ground, so to speak. We need wisdom and God's insight to speak the right words and to offer ministry that is impactful and meaningful. Wisdom and revelation also lead to growth in us as followers too. Paul sees the development of faith as a process – both in the believer and in the one hearing the gospel. The same is true of the ministry of the church. An outreach ministry like our newly forming digital faith community is a great example of this. We are seeking to be in ministry to our community in a new way and we certainly need divine direction and guidance as we proceed down a largely unknown and definitely unfamiliar road. We are praying daily for this process and this ministry.

In verses eighteen and nineteen Paul identifies some of the outcomes of faith built upon a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Here Paul identifies these four outcomes of a mature faith: *"eyes of your heart*

*enlightened... know what is the hope to which he has called you... know the riches of his glorious inheritance... know the immeasurable greatness of his power for us*

*who believe"*. With our heart enlightened we see and understand the world as God sees and understands the world. Knowing the hope to which we are called gives us a confidence to boldly witness to our faith. Knowing the glorious inheritance that awaits us, we live without fear or doubt about our eternal home. Knowing the immeasurable greatness of Jesus' power, we trust that all things are possible for those who believe in Jesus.







This place of assurance and a more complete trust is, of course, one that takes time to reach. And the ways of the world are always chipping away at our assurance and trust in God. Turn back with me to John 17 to better

understand how this process is worked out in each of us. When we lived in the world, we were not without God. God's grace was at work in our lives even when we did not believe. In our Methodist lingo this is called

"prevenient grace" – the grace that goes before. It is that grace that helps us understand right and wrong, good and evil in the world. It is that voice that begins to



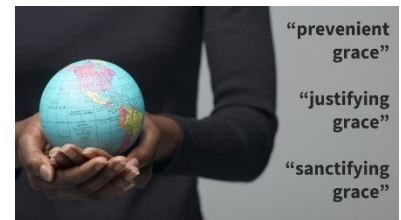
whisper truth into our hearts and minds. Once we recognize and come to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior we began to live within his

"justifying grace" – the grace that makes us right with Christ. As we begin our journey of faith, we usually start strong but stumble along the way. It is justifying grace



that makes us right again with God over and over. Just as prevenient grace draws us towards faith, so too does justifying grace draw us closer to Christ. As

we mature in our faith and become more and more like Christ, we begin to experience his "sanctifying grace" – the grace that makes us increasingly into Jesus' image.



Not that we no longer sin, but we sin less as we are

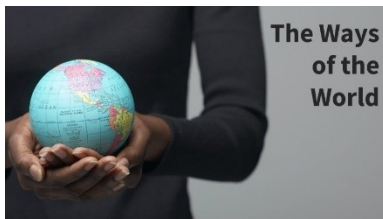
made more and more into his image. Although there is a general progression

from prevenient to justifying to sanctifying grace, it is not a straight-line A-B-C

progression. For example, God's justifying grace remains at work in us until the day we die. We might sin less as we mature in the faith, but we still sin.

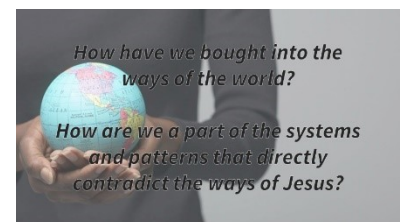


We will ever need God's justifying grace to bring forgiveness and to make us new again in God's sight. In verse seventeen Jesus prays in these terms, saying, *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"*. Jesus knows that to complete the mission of building the kingdom of God the disciples must continue to grow and grow in their faith. They must come to know God deeper and deeper if they are going to live in the world but to be of God's world. Jesus is asking God to continue to draw the disciples deeper and deeper into their faith and into their trust in him. This is the process that we are all a part of as well. Each of us are being called into a more personal, more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We are never "there". We are ever "going on to perfection" as John Wesley said. You and I are ever drawing closer to Christ in this life and will one day be made perfect as we join him in eternity. Until then we are a work in progress.



Being a work in progress comes with challenges, doesn't it? As I begin to draw to a close this morning, I want to give you a few things to consider and to pray on as you

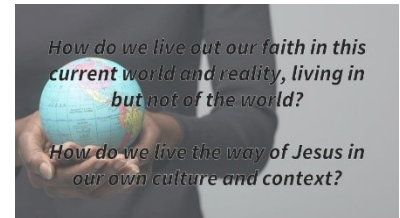
leave this morning and reflect on how you live as one in the world but not of the world. To do so I have framed a couple of sets of questions. The first set of questions are these: How have we bought into the ways of the world? How are we a part of the systems and patterns that directly



contradict the ways of Jesus? Our world is a very segmented and delineated place. Human beings naturally seek to be with those who are like them and who see and relate to the world as they do. Examples abound – we just have to look towards the political world or the school cafeteria to see this lived out.

Jesus modeled life in community by welcoming all and by engaging those that others would avoid or neglect. What will we see today as we gather for Fellowship time? Will we tend towards those we already know, or will we practice the radical hospitality and welcome that Jesus modeled?

Here is the second set of questions: How do we live out our faith in this current world and reality, living in but not of the world? How do we live the way of Jesus in



our own culture and context? Our current culture is still somewhat accepting of the Christian faith. But at times we will encounter some anti-religious sentiment. In this reality, I must be aware of how I respond when someone dangles a little bait in the form of a comment on a faith post. Maybe in some cases the best choice is not to respond. Yet in others a response is called for. Before I hit "send" I must think through whether or not my response brings glory to the kingdom of God? There is a fine line between speaking the truth in love and alienating or offending someone.

For me, as well as for many of you, the challenge often comes in finding non-church opportunities and unchurched or de-churched people to engage with. Many of our friends and most of our activities revolve around the church. The unique challenge is to find spaces and places where we are truly in the world but not totally drawn into following the ways of the world. Remaining closely connected to Jesus as we enter the world is essential for living out a faithful witness in the world.



In verses eighteen and nineteen Jesus prays as he sends his sanctified or holy disciples out into the world. To be sanctified or holy means we have been separated from the world and we are living a life that is aligned with

God's will and reflects God's passions. Equipped by the Spirit, we are empowered by God's word to enter the world without being drawn into the evils and darkness of the world. When we truly live in but not of the world, we manifest the light and love of Christ to the world, drawing others towards following Jesus, fulfilling the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17. Living as disciples of Christ, we are sent into the world to make disciples of all nations for the transformation of the world. As we shine the light of Christ into the darkness of the world, may we go forth today with the *"immeasurable greatness of his power"*. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. Reflecting on your daily rhythms and practices, which best manifest the light and love of Christ? How can you emphasize these more often?
- 2) *Pray*. As we consider the challenge of "living in but not of the world", where do you need to better align with Jesus' way? Pray for strength!
- 3) *Study*. Read Acts 1: 1-11. In what ways do you sense God's power at work in your life? To whom can you witness his love this week?