

“The world...in the world...of the world...from the world...to the world” –

Jesus uses the word “world” in different ways

13 times in our gospel reading today.

That caught my attention.

Jesus has just finished his last supper with the disciples.

It is the night he will go to meet

his betrayer and those who arrest him.

But, he prays for his disciples first.

This passage is part of his final, or his farewell discourse.

It is a priestly prayer because he prays to

God on behalf of others and he sets

the disciples apart from the rest of the world.

And Jesus prays about these disciples and their relationship with the world.

He starts by recapping his ministry with

his disciples whom God gave him from the world.

As we hear him praying, he is pleased with his disciples

and their time together –

they have kept God’s word,

they have knowledge that Jesus came from God

and that all things given to Jesus came from God.

And the he goes on, not to pray for the world itself,

but for those who have been chosen to carry on in his name.

This is a prayer for the disciples, for all believers afterward.

Jesus asks God to protect them,

to grant them a relationship with God like Jesus has with God.

Just as Jesus never belonged to the world,

the disciples don’t either and

they will benefit from God’s protection

in the face of coming hatred and evil.

As much as Jesus loves and seeks protection for his followers, he knows their purpose is also to be in the world,

sent into the world, sanctified –

set apart, made different than the rest of the world.

Sanctified and sent into the world to be

witnesses to God’s word – God’s truth.

The truth to take to the world is what Jesus made known to them – God’s name – which encompasses more than just God’s name, but God’s nature, God’s character – God’s way of being in the world.

Being in the world, but not of it would bring hatred from the world to those who were sent into the world. When and why did the world stop hating us?

Two weeks ago when we read and meditated on this passage in our Sunday Bible Study, someone asked if I thought Christians were persecuted for their beliefs. No, I responded, but this prayer is still comforting to me as a believer given that every day we are confronted with temptation toward world standards.

Over these last two weeks, I have thought more and more about this question and my response. At first it seems like progress to not be hated or having to risk your life, but is it really? It felt like I was missing the mark with my answer; that there was something that we were not really taking in.

When was the last time you were hated because your faith caused you to act boldly? Perhaps you have faced opposition for saying that the gospel calls us to inclusion of people regardless of sexuality. When was the last time you were hated for raising questions of “politics” in church, or suggesting to non-church goers that Christians have something to say about political issues?

When was the last time you felt in the world but not of the world? I wonder if the problem isn’t the other way around—that mostly, we are all too assimilated to the world.

In the world meaning, we live here, but we don’t belong to the world. We do belong in the world—Christ sends us here--but we don’t belong TO the world. When was the last time you explained to someone that while living and working shoulder-to-shoulder and elbow-to-elbow with everyone else, you don’t really belong here? That your success isn’t measured by the same standards? Or, more than explaining this to someone else, what would it mean to believe this yourself, and act on it-- how would it change how you spend your time and think about yourself and set your priorities?

Now, I’m not suggesting the mark of a good Christian is how many people hate you for it, but we need to look at why the world hated Jesus and his disciples. We need to look at why the early church members were hated by the world, by those around them.

And let’s clarify ‘the world’ that Jesus is talking about.

‘The world’ that Jesus is referring to is the disorder and rupture of creation caused by sin. He’s talking about the way in which we humans have organized our society and where we go wrong. Things like organizations and institutions for the welfare of all people; avenues to justice and peace.

Jesus came into the world and didn’t accept the established rules and authority of the Roman authorities or the Jewish religion.

Jesus came into the world and
welcomed the sick and the hurting.
He told us to love and be kind and
he taught us how to act in such ways.
Jesus sought and brought justice.
He is God's word. He is God's truth.

Jesus sends us into the world to take up his own work.
And he prays for our witness in this world.
A world we are in, but not of.

“Our world” with the sounds of Rolling Thunder motorcycles
and remembrance of those who have died for love.
“Our world” where accumulation of
wealth and assets often take center stage.
“Our world” where education facilities
and resources are lacking for our children.
“Our world” that we are responsible to God for.
Called lift our voices when it veers off course.
A world – institutions and organizations –
created and run by humans just like us;
humans that make mistakes and get priorities mixed up.
This world to which we are sent by Jesus that we too might keep God's word.

We live here, but we don't belong to the world,
we belong to God, and to one another.
We are a community set apart to be witnesses.
To be witnesses that the truth of the world –
the set up of the world is not gospel.
To witness to the world that we will not stand for injustice.
To witness to the world that violence brings
more violence and is not the answer.

Witnessing with the power of love
rather than hatred or vengeance.

This means that we are contradictory, counter-culture by the standards of many in the world.

When and why has the world stopped hating us?

As sanctified witnesses to God's name made known to the disciples and to us, we oppose the
world when the world opposes God's truth.

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Now, perhaps, the kingdom of God has come and we missed it? But we have only to look at the newspaper, to look outside our windows, to see that justice and love have not yet prevailed. So, no, we did not miss the arrival of God's kingdom in its fullness.

But in this prayer we are reminded to look honestly at the world, culture and our place in this world until the kingdom of God does arrive.

We are reminded to look honestly at the world around us and our choices about interacting with the world.

We are reminded to look honestly at who we are and who God calls us to be.

Maybe the world will hate us,
but Jesus continues to pray for us and to give us all that we need to be faithful and truthful witnesses in the world.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.