

Easter 7 – 16.05.21

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Today is the seventh Sunday after Easter and the first after the ascension. We have been hearing about the lives that as disciples we are expected to try to live. We have been learning in greater detail of the transcendental nature of Jesus as we grow in awareness of him as God. Today we are at the truly pointy end. Today we are recognising how we like Jesus transcend two worlds, this world of human experience in which we exist and the world of heaven in which we are called to belong.

Today's gospel passage is part of the larger unit of Jesus' last meal with his disciples that starts in Chapter 13 of John Gospel with the foot washing scene and concludes in chapter 17 with Jesus' prayer.

The prayer is sometimes referred to as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer," but that is not accurate, since Jesus is not portrayed in a priestly role in John. It comes closer to functioning as John's version of the Lord's Prayer with the address to the "Holy Father" and his "name" (verse 11) and the request for protection from the evil one (verse 15).

The prayer actually runs from verses 1-26. The verses preceding our text (1-5) focus on Jesus' glorification. While verses 6-19, focuses on Jesus' concerns for the disciples. Verses 20-26 close with Jesus' request for his disciples' unity and mutual love. Immediately following the prayer, Jesus and the disciples go across the Kidron Valley to the garden where Judas will betray him.

John writes in a form that takes the reader on a winding journey that can appear cryptic and repetitive, but this is deliberate. By repeating words John is stressing points to us.

So what words are standing out?

World – Given – Word – Truth – Sanctify

Why are these words significant?

Lets work through them.

World: Through accepting Jesus as the Christ we cease to be as it were, fully of this world. We become through the blessing of The Holy Spirit subjects of God's Kingdom. We become as we describe it, Christians. Consider, the disciples were like us born of this world, and like us they were chosen from the world (verse 6), they are in the world (verse 11), even hated by the world (verse 14), because they are no longer simply of the world (verses 14, 16). Remember Jesus was sent by the father into the world, so too Jesus sends the disciples, including you and I, into the world to continue his mission. But this world is different to the Kingdom of God in one key way, the "evil one" is at work in the world, and so Jesus prays that the disciples be protected from but not that they be taken out of the world (verse 15).

Given: In Greek (didomi) occurs nine times in this passage. It is acknowledged that the Father gave the disciples to Jesus (verses 6, 9). Everything (verse 7), including the words (verse 8) and the “word” (verse 14) that the Father gave Jesus, Jesus has given to the disciples. The “name” that the Father gave Jesus is the name which protects the disciples (verses 11-12).

Word: For John there is no doubt Jesus is the Word (logos) God as human. and so there is a double meaning when Jesus talks about how the Father has given his disciples the “word” (verse 14) and that this word which they have kept is the truth (verses 6, 17).

Truth: This section of the prayer is framed by “truth,” a repeated and significant theme in John which also has a double entendre. (See also John 1:14, 17; 8:32; 18:37-38.) In John 17:8, Jesus affirms that the disciples know the truth of his origin from the Father. In verses 17-18, Jesus asks that they be sanctified in the truth which is also confirmed as God’s word. All this comes together to confirm what Jesus, the Word, had previously said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

Sanctify: This concept is the climax of this part of the prayer (verses 17-19). The word used, *hagiazō*, is the same word in the Lord’s Prayer traditionally rendered as “hallowed.” It is noteworthy, then, to consider that the way in which God’s name is to be regarded as sacred is also what Jesus prays for his disciples. Consider also Jesus’ statement in John 10:34-36 where his own sanctification is what qualifies him to be God’s Son. Similarly, then, our sanctification is the basis for our claim to be children of God. This sanctity is not just an abstract reality or the grounds for claiming a godly status. It is described as being “in the truth” which is equated with the “word” as noted above, and here is where things get interesting.

First, this sanctification has a purpose which is given in verse 18: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” That is, sanctification is not a way of being made pure and holy by being set apart. It is intended as the way for disciples to be sent forth to share the t/Truth and the w/Word. It is not a way of being taken out of the world but being sent into it. (See also John 20:21 for a similar commissioning.)

Second, verse 19 points to how the sanctification occurs by connecting our sanctification with Jesus’. What does it mean for Jesus to sanctify himself? I believe that it must refer to his action of laying down his life on the cross and taking it up again in his resurrection. (See also John 10:17-18!) What then does it mean for us be sanctified in the t/Truth? We can return to Jesus’ own words earlier in this discourse at the last meal in John 15:11-13: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Our sanctification, therefore, comes freely to us at a cost to God in Christ, but it is not cheap grace. It also comes in the experience of losing our own lives. (See also John 12:25.)

How is God speaking to us as a church as individuals, as disciples of Christ?

As with John in general, this passage functions on two levels:

1. the prayer Jesus shared with his disciples around 30 CE and
2. the ongoing relevance of that prayer for Jesus' disciples later in the first century when the text was written and shared in the Johannine community.

This perspective becomes explicit in verses 20-23 where Jesus refers to those who will come to believe based on the original disciples' testimony. This latter context also serves to make John transparent and applicable to Jesus' disciples today. For the first disciples and for us, sanctification in the t/Truth and w/Word, therefore, is both a matter of what God does for us in Christ and what we experience in being sent into the world as messengers of that w/Word and disciples who love one another, even to the point of laying down our lives.

As we read our passage from Acts today this is what John is writing about. By knowing and understanding the relationship of the Logos we are equipped to be disciples of Christ. AMEN