

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

May 16, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

John 17:6-19

6 "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. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 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. 9 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. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 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. 12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and new life,
Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

This weekend I watched the Oscar winning Documentary of this year, "My Octopus Teacher." It is a surprisingly touching documentary about a nature filmmaker, Craig Foster, who got burned out by his job and lifestyle which deeply affected his health and connection to his family. He decided to take some time off at home to reset and regroup. During his time at home, he got back to a favorite childhood activity of free diving in the ocean and started frequenting in a Kelp Forest near his home in Cape Town, South Africa. During one of his trips, he ended up encountering an Octopus and through daily visits to her den, gained her trust. So far, this sounds most like a normal nature documentary, but the film goes a lot deeper than just sharing some cool shots of the Octopus and the rest of the ecosystem. Craig Foster shares the personal journey his daily diving trips and budding friendship with this Octopus brought him on. I highly recommend watching it if you have a Netflix account. It is great as a nature documentary alone and the story makes it all the more touching.

I'm going to play the trailer for you now as it shares some of the best highlights of his personal journey and I think it is better to hear it in his own words.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3s0LTDhq5A>

"I had to have a radical change in my life"

"You start thinking about your own vulnerability..."

"I realized I was changing. My relationship with people, with humans, was changing."

"What she taught me was to feel that you are part of this place. Not a visitor. That's a huge difference."

He shares a powerful testimony of all that he learned in that year visiting the Octopus.

A couple of pieces of his testimony that I found to be powerful that were not in the trailer: As he got to know this Octopus and learned so many details of the interlocking ecosystem she was part of he realized how disconnected he had become to the "other," both to animals and to people, including his family. One of the ways that he chose to get close to the "other" in his diving trips is that he swam without a wetsuit. He shared, "If you really want to get close to an environment like this, it helps tremendously to have no barrier to that environment."

What was so striking to me about Craig Foster's story is his testimony to the importance of grounding ourselves in the present moment and in our own environments and in our relationships. He speaks clearly about how transformative it was for him to spend time recognizing the importance and beauty of being part of this world, of this creation. He doesn't talk about faith, but his final line in that trailer speaks to the spiritual significance this experience with the Octopus had on him, "What she taught me was to feel that you are part of this place. Not a visitor. That's a huge difference."

This idea of being part of this place, not a visitor, is one of the big questions we could have after reading today's scripture as it circles a few times around the idea of us as Christians not belonging to this world but also being sent into the world.

Addressing the tension between those two aspects of living a Christian life makes sense in this part of the Gospel story. Chapter 17 is the conclusion of the Farewell Discourse, or Jesus's goodbye speech to his Disciples. Spanning over a few chapters in John, Jesus shares plenty of final advice and wisdom as he knows that the next day he will be crucified, then resurrect, and 40 days after that would be ascending to Heaven. So, very soon the Disciples and all Jesus followers would be sent forth to continue Jesus's ministry and be Christ's hands and feet in the world. This last part of the Farewell speech is a bit different than the rest. Most of the speech is directed toward the Disciples, but this final part, all of chapter 17, is a recording of Jesus's spoken prayer to God. Today we are focusing on the middle, longest section of the prayer that is his prayer to God for those who will be forming the Christian church, for those who come after, his prayer for us. This prayer is pastoral, praying for the hardships and challenges that the Christians would face by living out their faith. That said, the language of the prayer as recorded in the Gospel gets a bit confusing as it repeats the same words and makes many indirect references of you and them and me. Even though any one of these verses is not so confusing on its own, I find when I read this chapter in John all at once that I get a bit lost when hearing it all together.

So, let's simplify it a bit. What is Jesus praying for to God on our behalf? The first few verses is basically Jesus's version of that popular phrase by Joel Osteen, "It's not who you but whose you are." It is Jesus claiming that those he is talking about are those who have come to believe what Jesus preached and taught and so, because Jesus is God and was sent by God, all those who are Jesus's followers are also God's. Jesus is also identifying that it is those who have come to believe in the true identity of Jesus and God's present work that Jesus is currently praying for. Jesus is praying for those that are active in the faith here.

The middle part, mainly verse 11, is a prayer that those who have been claimed by Jesus to be God's will be united or be one. Jesus doesn't really elaborate on the specifics of what unity looks like here, but based on the greater library of Jesus's teachings that we are familiar with, we can conclude that it is not unity for unity's sake that perpetuates the status quo. Looking to Jesus's example we can conclude that part of this is living out ministry as Jesus did in service and humility, and not lording ourselves over others or the world. Perhaps this call for unity is a preface for Jesus's prayer that would come during his Crucifixion, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus was committed to see all as beloved Children of God even when they disagreed with him and his identity. Jesus's prayer here is for God to help us hold onto that.

This call for unity leads into a prayer of protection over those who would take on the brunt of persecution and marginalization at the hands of those who did not like Jesus or the new movement. This prayer of protection is weaved into the reason why it is particularly necessary, because Jesus is sending his Disciples and all of us who have come to believe in him into the world just as he was sent into the world. We are to work

and serve those who do not yet identify with God. Let us not forget that we are God's and not the world's and also have the work to be made more holy or separate from the world by being sanctified in the truth that is the Word of Christ. Jesus prays to God to help us navigate those conflicting aspects of our call as Christians, to be in the world and separate from the world; to both grow in our identity as God's and stay true to our mission as the continuation of Jesus's ministry to be in the world. Jesus is modeling for us in his prayer one of the main things we should continue to pray about and seek the Spirit's help with, forming our identity around being different because of our relationship with Christ and also being called by Christ to fully be in and serve the world.

To summarize it: We are God's and Jesus's people. We are united by that identity with God's help. Living out that identity can cause others to ostracize or even persecute us, which is basically inevitable as Jesus sends us to be in the world to continue his ministry. While we do that we are also to be allowing God to help us grow to be more holy or more like Jesus.

This was Jesus's prayer to God for those in that moment and all to come after, but as Jesus spoke it aloud, and it was recorded in scripture, it is also a reminder for those who hear it. To boil it down to the most basic lesson: We need each other and we need God and Jesus.

When we are able to simplify this prayer in smaller chunks, we can see there is a lot more going on here than may meet the eye on one read through. With all the confusing and repetitive language, there are some take aways that would be easy to pick out without considering the rest of the text. One of those assumptions that has been plucked out and been used to support ideas that are not quite congruent with this passage as a whole is the idea that we should have nothing to do with the world because we "do not belong to the world." This phrase and the other claims like it in this passage are often used in tandem with verses like Romans 12:2: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world" to support an exclusive lens to Christian theology. In other words, this text is often used to condemn and chastise those of other religions or outside the Christian community or argue that we are best to only associate with those within the Christian bubble. It has also been used to convince Christians that they do not need to do anything about the plights of the world or the other people in it, or talk about the effects of politics and current events on the world and the many people in it, or that we need not do more than convert people to believe in God. It is important to be clear that this is not a text about inter-religious relations or what that should look like, and is also not a call for Christians to isolate themselves from taking part in the reality of the world or with other people. This passage is part of a greater speech by Jesus to the Christian community and is specifically a prayer by Jesus for the Christian community specifically. We do better to focus on what this text has to say to and about us as Christians rather than anyone else.

Just as much as, if not more than, Jesus says we are not the world's, that we do not belong to the world, Jesus speaks to our call to be in the world. Verse 11: "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you." Verse 15: "15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." Verse 18: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into

the world.” These were the verses that stood out to me while I read the text this week and the idea that stuck with me as I watched “My Octopus Teacher.” As Craig Foster said, “What she taught me was to feel that you are part of this place. Not a visitor. That’s a huge difference.” When we forget or don’t pay attention to our call to be in the world as part of continuing Jesus’s ministry we can start to think of ourselves as visitors here on this earth, just visitors without this life having meaning besides being a stepping stone to being in heaven with God. Jesus’s repeated reminders that we are in the world, that God is not to take us out of the world, that we are sent into the world tell us that we are meant to be part of this place. We are meant to be in and part of this world. Yes, at the same time we do not belong to this world because we belong to God, but as our identity lies in God, we are sent as Jesus was sent to live in the world and bring God’s love into the world with us. We can remember John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he sent His only Son.” Now, as Jesus passes the baton of his ministry to his Disciples he prays in John 17:18, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Jesus was sent to be God’s love embodied and shared with the world, now Jesus sends us. Next week we will talk a bit more about how Jesus helps us make that happen with the gift of the Holy Spirit as celebrated on Pentecost.

This call to go out and be part of the world is a good reminder for all of us on all parts of the faith journey. It is easy for us to fall into a rut like the one Craig Foster described, unconsciously and gradually becoming disconnected from the world, the present moment, and his relationships. It is easy in our busy lives to let our to-do lists and our aspirations or even the things that are necessary like earning money to pay the bills to take over and make us belong more to the world than to God. It is easy for those things to pull our focus away from living out God’s love in the world so that we are just living in the world and not remembering our call by God who sent us into the world to be part of it with intention.

We are called to be in the world as the ongoing ministry of Jesus as the hands and feet of Jesus. As we look to emulate Jesus’s ministry it is important to remember that Jesus put aside his superiority and humbled himself to live a full human life alongside humans, meeting them each where they were and accepting them into the fold as they were. Jesus sends us in the same way. We are not to go into the world, into our communities with holier than thou attitudes or thinking we are “above” the world because we are God’s. Just as Jesus was, we are born a human the same way as everyone else, we are made up of flesh and blood, we are part of this creation of this world. As we come into our identity with God, as we come to faith, in believing in God, in developing our relationship with Jesus, we are then sent to let our place in the world be a place that shares the love of God. To do that as Jesus did we must become close with those in the world, we must share in normal life with them, eat with them, share in human moments and needs together. As we grow in our faith and relationship with God, as we grow in our holiness and become more like how Jesus teaches us to be, as we are sanctified, our call to the world also grows. The more we grow in our relationship with God the more we can embody God’s love in the world.

When I think about what it looks like to be in the world and belong to God in practice I think of my days in college. I did a lot of faith development in college, growing with God

in so many important ways, largely due to my involvement in Christian communities there. I also spent a lot of my time as part of extra-curricular groups on campus: choir, student activity board, Habitat for Humanity, other secular service organizations. I grew so much in my faith in those years, and can pinpoint many God moments through those years, but the times that I most felt like I was truly embodying God, like God was working through me, was in my relationships and experiences “in the world” or in those extracurricular activities. One example is a friendship with someone in choir that led to many late night deep conversations about life and talking through how to make it through tough situations. I would share my perspective that stems from my faith. I still hear from that friend when we catch up that when similar situations come up, he hears my voice in his head and it helps him address it in a more calm and caring way. As I spent so much of the last 3 years focusing so much on my faith and religion, I have so missed getting to spend as much time living out my faith in the real world. I look forward to the upcoming months as we ease out of the pandemic and being part of the world becomes more possible for all of us.

This is a unique time in our lives in the current generations as we have been forced to slow down our hectic lives, to assess all that we have going on, and to have some time to plan and consider the ways that we want to re-enter into fully living in the world. Perhaps this year has brought some of you experiences like Craig Foster’s, though probably not as exotic, that have helped you realize that you are part of this world. Perhaps you still need the reminder that we are not meant to be mere visitors here just waiting to cash in our ticket to heaven. Perhaps you still aren’t sure about this belonging to God thing. No matter where you are on the journey, this prayer is still for you. Jesus’s prayer echoes through time as we read this text. No matter where you are on your own path, know that Jesus will always welcome you as one of his own, as one of God’s. Know that Jesus is excited about the little things and big things that connect us to this world and our finite life on it. Those unique things that make us who we are and make our life what it is is what makes us uniquely ready to share God’s love in our communities. Know that Jesus sends us, praying for the protection of our hearts in the face of hardship. Know that as God loves his Son, God loves us, and just as God did not forsake or abandon Jesus, Jesus has not left us abandoned. Let us accept our call from God, let us go into the world, and let us look forward to the good news of Pentecost that is yet coming.

Let us pray.

Forgiving and gracious God, you have called us to be the church, to live out our Resurrection faith. You have asked us to place our trust in you and to bring to all the good news of your saving love. But we have failed to do this. We have given our faith a back seat to the troubles and to the stresses in our own life. We look for the quick and easy answers. Forgive us for the smallness of our faith. You, who raised Christ from the dead, have promised to raise our spirits and bring us to new life. You have done this and yet, we remain static in our response to you. Clear our spirits of the clutter of everyday living. Help us to be open always to your word and your love. Challenge us to

move in directions of peace and hope for all people. These things we pray in the name of our risen Lord.

Forgiveness and love have been poured out upon you, to offer hope to all nations. You are called and blessed to be messengers of God's good news to all people. AMEN.