

**May 16, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Easter 7
John 17:6-21**

Let's begin the sermon with a joke, not because you haven't heard it before (I'm sure you have), but because it leads into today's gospel from the 17th chapter of John so well. It goes this way: "A Buddhist monk walks up to a hot dog vendor, winks, and says: 'Make me one with everything ...' That's it. It might take a moment. A Buddhist monk walks up to a hot dog vendor and says: 'Make me one with everything...'

Why does that old worn joke remind me of today's gospel from the 17th chapter of John? Because, in this final prayer just before his death Jesus asks his father to make all of us one with everything. Him. The disciples. You. Me. God. Everything. One. John's rhetoric is almost hypnotic. His language is elevated in this highly spiritual prayer as Jesus asks that they all might be one. He prayed, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one..."

John is the most spiritual of the four gospels and spirituality is my own flat side, so it is always a challenge for me to preach on the 17th chapter, the most spiritual of all in John's book. The prayer is so other-worldly and I lean more to the this-worldly side of things and have always felt that Christians need to be very much involved in this world if we are going to address things Jesus addressed like poverty, homelessness, hunger, and injustice.

So, on the surface of things, I have heretofore been sort of put off when John has Jesus tell God this, "They (meaning his followers) ... they

do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” He goes on to tell his father he wants to protect his followers from the world. Well, as someone once said about a minister who used to preach in the clouds, “He is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good.” Is that what is going on here? Is Jesus saying the world is bad and that we do not need to be part of the world?

It is helpful to know that John often writes dualistically. He contrasts one thing with another: Darkness vs. light, death vs. life, falsehood vs. truth, flesh vs. spirit. And he does take sides. One thing is usually better than the other. Also, John goes to great pains to point out that this world is a very dangerous place. And with this point I would add four exclamation points. This is the world which crucified Jesus. This is the world ruled by patriarchal structures, police violence, oppression of the poor, closing of borders, income inequality. The list goes on.

It is *this* world which Jesus is concerned about in his final prayer to his father. “They don’t belong to that,” Jesus prays, “just as I don’t belong to that.”

Well, if we don’t belong to that, what do we belong to? Are we to live monastic lives where we pray and sing all day behind cloistered walls? Is the whole object to lift ourselves away from this world?

Well, no. And the Jesus in John’s biography doesn’t say that. As a matter of fact, Jesus prays to his father, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them...”

The other three biographers of Jesus’ life, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all use a term that I wish John would have used more (or used at all): The Kingdom of God. In the other biographies, whenever Jesus told stories about the Kingdom of God he used this-worldly imagery: lost coins which were found, a treasure in a field, rescued sheep. It was to be

understood that a person could be very much of this world and still live in the Kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, the more one got down-and-dirty in fixing the things Jesus came to fix, the more one *was* part of the Kingdom of God.

This, really, is the essence of Jesus' final conversation with his father in the 17th chapter of John. He really *does* say this. We just need to listen hard. There are a lot of words there.

If *you* knew that you were to die the next day, as Jesus did, what would *you* ask God of the loved ones you would leave behind? Wouldn't you say something like, "Please, God, keep my family safe from harm and danger." Wouldn't you say something like, "Be with them and make us all one again in your kingdom." Wouldn't you plead with God on their behalf. This is what Jesus is doing.

It's a dangerous world out there. How do you go about living in the Kingdom of God while at the same time being a citizen of the world?

I am pleased to announce that The Rev. Megan Rohrer has been elected as bishop in our Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, becoming the first openly transgender person in the U.S. to do so in a major Christian denomination. Rev. Rohrer attended a Lutheran College in the Midwest and told this to NPR. She said, "The people who were in my religion classes with me would sing hymns when I walked by, to try to get rid of my gay demons. And I would just sing harmony."

That impressed me that someone could be so comfortable in their own skin, so at-home with who they were, that they could smile and sing harmony in the face of oppression and prejudice. I think this is something of what Jesus had in mind when he asked his father to sanctify his followers. Sanctification sounds like such a high and holy word, but it

really means becoming fully who we are in the skin God gave us, being who God made us to be ... and, yes, being one with God.

There is a sequel to that somewhat subtle story I told you about the Buddhist monk who walks up to a hot dog vendor, winks, and says, ‘Make me one with everything.’ After a brief chuckle at the monk’s joke the vendor hands him his hot dog with everything and says, “That’ll be \$4 please.” The monk hands over a \$10 bill and waits while the vendor just stares back at him. Awkwardly, the monk asks, “What about my change.” The vendor just winks back at the monk and says, “Ah, but change must come from within.”

Yes, Jesus wants us to change the world. But he prays to his father that, first, change must come with us and within us.