

Subject: Jesus prays for the disciple's unity, joy, and protection.

Sub-title: As truth is combined with love, our unity and joy will attract others to Christ.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/sm7LK8gy3D8>

The setting of our Gospel takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ is found praying for his disciples as he is getting ready to leave this world, and in doing so, he prepares them for the difficulties that lay ahead. He knew what the cross represented for himself in terms of personal pain and horror, but he also knew how devastating it would be for his followers. From the standpoint of the world, the cross would represent a tragic defeat and shameful death. Yet, from God's viewpoint, it would be the means of overcoming evil and delivering his children from the domain of darkness and sin.

In this prayer, Jesus identified his disciples as those whom the Father has given to him "out of the world."¹ The word "world" is used ten times in this prayer. And so a careful understanding of what Christ meant by using this word is in order. The original word that is repeatedly used is "kosmos."² It's a word that literally means "something ordered" or an "ordered system." The physical world as a whole is an "ordered system," but in most cases, the New Testament writers used the term to mean something more than just the earth, but to the principle of evil that entered the world after Adam's fall into sin. Therefore, this term most frequently refers to the world's philosophical system and wisdom in contrast to the knowledge of God as found in Christ, whose teachings revealed the kingdom of God. Therefore, the world that Jesus refers to is

¹ John 17:6

² Strong's Concordance, #2889 κόσμος (literally, "something ordered") – properly, an "ordered system"

characterized by selfishness and self-indulgence and has no regard for God and his laws. In Saint John's first epistle he tells us, "Do not love the world or the things of this world ... For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world."³ Other parts of the New Testament describe this world as being under the dominion of darkness, ruled by "the prince of the power of the air,"⁴ Satan himself. We can never fully comprehend such evil, but there are times when you can feel it and see evidence of it when people use their words to incite hatred and violence. At other times, it is more subtle. The world's philosophies and basic principles run counter to and boldly contradict God's revealed truth. For example:

The world may say:
Save your life
Put your own interest first

Exalt yourself
Look to your own interest
Get all you can in life
Giving impoverishes
Love grows cold
Hate your enemies

But God says:
Lose your life (Matt 16:25)
"If anyone wants to be first,
he must be last of all and
servant of all" (Mk 9:35).
Humble yourself (Lk 14:10)
Look to the interests of others
Give liberally (Lk 6:38)
Giving causes increase
Love never fails (I Cor 13:8)
Love your enemies (Matt 5:44)

These are just a few areas where God's ways are different from human ones, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Therefore, Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is

³ 1 John 2:15-16

⁴ Ephesians 2:1

truth.”⁵ The word “sanctify” comes from the Greek verb that means to “make holy, or set something or someone apart as holy.”⁶ This dedication to God means that a believer will be set of priorities as God set him apart for a particular purpose. We are meant to make a difference in this world, but to make that difference, we must be engaged with the world. Therefore, Jesus prayed, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”⁷ But being in the world but not of it is no easy task. I remember my mother, who was well-connected with her community and local country club, once saying with lament, “There are times when I think my friends have more influence on me than I on them.” That same temptation is familiar to us all. But she made a difference not because she was so perfect or better than anyone else but because she loved her friends and genuinely cared about them. Her demeanor reminded me of the famously quoted verse about how “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son”⁸ (the word for the world in that verse is the same that used in John 17. Paul also tells us that “God showed his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”⁹ He came not to condemn the world but to love the world.

Consequently, Jesus calls us to be the “salt of the earth.”¹⁰ Salt was used to preserve food from spoiling, and therefore, it is an appropriate metaphor for a Christian’s role in preserving the world from corruption. Salt is a chemical compound known as sodium chloride. One theologian noted that when these two

⁵ John 17:17

⁶ Strong’s Concordance #37 hagiazo (hag-ee-ad'-zo): It also means “to hallow or dedicate to God”

⁷ John. 17:15

⁸ John 3:16

⁹ Romans 5:8

¹⁰ Matthew 5:13

ingredients are bound together, it is similar to the way that truth and love are meant to be bound together. But if you have one without the other, you lose your effectiveness and become obnoxious. Jesus prayed that the virtues of truth and love be bound together in unity so that our joy would be complete and “that the world may believe that you (our Heaven Father) have sent me.”¹¹

The Collect for today acknowledges this need and asks, “Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us.”¹²

Our New Testament lesson from Acts depicts the Christian community after our Lord’s Ascension to heaven and tells us how the disciples “...were constantly devoting themselves to prayer”¹³ as they waited for the promise of the Spirit.

So they prayed. They waited. They gathered. They took care of each other. Together, they live through the labor pains of Jesus’ death—resurrection—and departure to give birth to a new thing—A new way of life—a new truth—a new community, a community in which God lives by his Spirit and express itself by both truth and love.

So, let’s be faithful to ask, seek, and knock for the things on Jesus’ heart as he prayed for us, and let us wait in expectation for the new thing God has planned and promised, for the gift of his Spirit is ours for the asking. *Amen.*

¹¹ John 17:21

¹² BCP, p. 226 Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter: The Sunday after Ascension Day

¹³ See Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”