

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Reflections for Emmaus Groups at St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, Virginia

Preparing for Sunday, May 13, 2018 // Easter 7, Year B

The Gospel: John 17:6-19

Looking up to heaven, Jesus prayed, "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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 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. 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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. 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. 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. 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. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

Background and general observations

This passage from John's Gospel is in the section involving the Last Supper. Jesus is preparing to leave the disciples, and this entire passage is Jesus' prayer to God. Jesus is asking God to protect the disciples, much as we might pray that God take care of people whom we love. But Jesus' prayer also acknowledges that serious challenges are ahead.

*As Jesus prays, we are reminded that Jesus was sent by God, just as Old Testament prophets were sent by God. When prophets spoke, they spoke with the authority of the One who sent them. So, they could say, "Thus says the Lord..." With Jesus, this sense of authority is magnified—he not only **spoke** the word of the Lord, but he embodied it. In his life and person, not just in his speech, Jesus has revealed God (the Word became flesh).*

Having been reminded that God sent Jesus into the world in this special way, to embody and make known the Divine Presence in the world, we now hear Jesus praying, "As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." This is a powerful statement about the nature of the Christian life and might be an important thing to ponder: we are to embody and reveal Jesus, just as Jesus has embodied and revealed God.

This is a time of bewilderment for the disciples who are undoubtedly feeling anxious and uncertain about what will happen next. But in Jesus' prayer, he notes that the disciples are close to his heart and that the disciples have much in common with Jesus, and thus they have much in common with God. They have God's word, just as Jesus has; they are being sent into the world, as Jesus was sent into the world; they do not belong to the world; and they are hated by the world. Jesus prays that the disciples "may be one" as he and the Father are one.

Ideas for discussing the application of this lesson to our daily lives

1. Jesus prays that God will “protect the disciples in God’s name.” Jesus says that he has protected the disciples “in God’s name” until now. But now Jesus is coming to God, and he commends the disciples to God’s keeping, God’s protection, and God’s care.

Think of a time when you have had to let go of someone you love who has perhaps relied on you for their safe-keeping. You must leave that person, or that person must leave you; and all you can do is commend that person to God, asking that God will keep and protect them.

What kind of confidence or faith do you have that God will protect your loved ones, and what do you even mean when you ask that God keep and protect them? Although we surely pray that God will keep our loved ones safe from bodily harm, Jesus must have known that his disciples, hated by the world, would suffer bodily harm and perhaps even death. Perhaps Jesus was praying that the disciples would be protected from following or succumbing to the destructive ways of the world, that they be kept in the love of God, no matter what the world might do to them.

What do you make of the idea of praying that God will protect your loved one, no matter what the world does to him or her? What does that mean? Can you pray for your loved ones in this way, confident in the protection of God, regardless of what might befall them in the world? What other kinds of harm are we praying against?

2. “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world,” Jesus says. Yet, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son....

What do you know about not belonging to the world, yet loving the world? What do you know about wishing you could escape the world or be taken out of it? How can we be “at home and at peace in God,” even “joyful” in God, when we are suffering, or are in hostile or adverse circumstances?

Consider talking with your group and learning from each other about strategies we can use for remaining at peace in God even when things and people around us are anxious or out of control.

3. A slightly different reflection on this question of being *in* the world but not feeling *of* the world: Many years ago, the British Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, wrote of the notable saintliness of Thomas Chalmers:

It should be said that this saintliness was not that of a spiritual recluse brooding in religious solitude. Here was a man, bustling, striving, organizing, speaking and preaching with the dust and fire of the world on his clothes, but carrying his shrine with him everywhere.

How does this description strike you? Is it a man in the world but not of the world? Does he seem more eccentric than holy? Could you relate to or listen to such a man or woman or would they be too off-putting? What do you think it means that he was “carrying his shrine with him everywhere”?

4. Jesus revealed God to the world. Now, we are sent into the world in the same way that Jesus was sent. It may be difficult to think of yourself in this way, as Christ-like, responsible for revealing God. How do you think you are doing?

It may be helpful to think of others in your life who support you in this godly work and who reveal God themselves. How do they do it? What are you learning from being in relationship with these people?

5. Jesus says in this prayer that he is glorified in the disciples. He speaks as if the disciples are a great gift to him and Jesus is deeply grateful to God for them. Yet, as we know, the disciples were often a bungling lot who sometimes misunderstood Jesus, and ultimately they would fail him and betray him.

Consider what we learn from this prayer about the importance of cherishing our friends and those who love us. How often do we take our friends and loved ones for granted? Yet, the fact that our friends care for us, treat us in a kindly fashion, remain loyal to us...this is a tremendous gift. What difference would it make in your life and in your friendships if you thought of your loved ones as great gifts, even though they might fail you? Every human being needs to know that he or she is cherished by someone.

Whom do you cherish? Who cherishes you?

Do you assume that this person *knows* you cherish him or her, or are you intentional about speaking your love and calling attention to the ways in which you value and treasure the relationship?

Have you known someone in your life who made a point of noting what made you so special in his or her eyes, who spoke about you as a gift from God? What difference has that person made in your life?

How can we be better friends to one another?