

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Seventh Sunday of Easter
John 17:11-19
May 28, 2006

“The Truth, the Whole Truth, Nothing But the Truth”

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

This Sunday is a little bit like an afterthought in the church year. It is called the Seventh Sunday of Easter which is true. But the celebration of Ascension Day last Thursday has intervened. In a sense the church is waiting like the disciples who gathered on the Mount of Olives and watched their Lord ascend into heaven for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. That will be the focus of next week's services on Pentecost Sunday.

Now in this context we look today at the words of the Holy Gospel for this morning. They are striking words for they are part of the great prayer which Jesus prayed for his disciples, for his church on the night of his betrayal and before his crucifixion. The prayer is called the “High Priestly Prayer” for Jesus as the great and true high priest offers up this prayer on behalf of his church. Others have called it the great intercessory prayer for it is filled with intercessions for Christ's own beloved children. Jesus would pray other prayers before his crucifixion, but this prayer is like a formal liturgical prayer which he offers for our instruction.

While we will look at the words of the entire prayer, we especially want to focus on the words of v.17: Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.” And on the basis of this verse we have as the theme: The Truth, the Whole Truth, Nothing But the Truth.

I. Protected

In the first place, Jesus prays that his Father would protect and keep his disciples. Protect them by the power of your name, Jesus prays. He says, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” It is interesting that they are protected by the name of both the Father and the Son, yet as Jesus points out numerous times in this prayer, both Father and Son share in the unity of the Godhead. In that unity is the unity of the church, the body of Christ as the people of God. It is as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4:4-6) Because the world hates them for they are not of the world, they still need the Father's protection. Jesus continues in his intercession, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” This is why the protection is so necessary. They need not be protected just from the world but from the evil one, from the devil himself and from his scheming works. In being kept by God they will find the full measure of the joy which is theirs because of Christ's redeeming love.

II. Sanctified

Then comes the central part of the Gospel for this day. Sanctify them, Jesus says. In the original language the word used for sanctify is a most interesting word. Sanctify means most basically to “make holy”. Make them holy, Jesus says. But it also can mean to be consecrated, set apart, dedicated to God like we consecrate and set apart the sacred furnishings and appointments of a church. There is probably a little bit of both meanings in this word for Jesus wants his Father in heaven to truly set apart his disciples for a sacred task. That this meaning is there may be clear from the words which follow. For in the closing verses of the text Jesus says, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (v.18-19) Jesus was sent into the world to accomplish a task, he was sanctified in the sense of being set apart for the work he was to do. His great task was to suffer, to die, to shed his holy blood for the sins of the world. He was set apart for that work. He was sent into the world to accomplish that. He now asks his Father to send the disciples in the same way into the world, to be set apart for the great task of witnessing to the saving Gospel of grace and truth.

III. In the Truth

And that leads to the remaining part of our text. Jesus prays that they may be sanctified in the truth. Oh, how that word has suffered in our day and age. How often do we despair to even know the truth. There are so many conflicting claims about the truth. This is true in so many areas. We don't know who is telling the truth anymore. And studies have shown that for many people it really doesn't make any difference. That is one of the results of our so-called post-modern era. People are willing to accept all kinds of even self-contradictory things as the truth. They have set up little compartments in their lives where they file away this fact or that one, even though they do not agree. The recent discussions brought about by the release of the DaVinci Code movie have shown this all too well. Even when it is pointed out to people that so much of that story is based on incorrect facts, you still hear, “But ...” People want a Jesus who is like them, a Jesus they do not have to worship, a Jesus who is a mortal man. But they reject the Jesus who is the Son of God, the eternal Word made flesh, the Jesus who suffered, died, and rose again for our sins. They would most certainly reject the words of our text where Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth.” For they most certainly reject the phrase which follows: “Your word is truth.” Do words spoken in courtrooms mean anything anymore: Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

IV. The Truthful Word

That brings us to the source of the truth. Jesus tells us most certainly where we can find the truth. It is not contained in the flighty fanciful thoughts of men. It is not in the latest fad or trend. It is not in what we think or feel or want. It is most assuredly not in a book like the DaVinci code or its movie version. The truth is in the word. It is in His word. There is the truth. God himself is the truth. He cannot lie or deceive for to do so would be to deny

his very nature. In the same way, God's word is the truth. It cannot lie or deceive. For the Word is the truth. And that is how God keeps us in the truth--by his Word. Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus reminds his disciples, "If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Free in the truth of the Word. Also Jesus spoke most assuredly when he said, "Scripture cannot be broken." The words of Scripture cannot be changed. St. Paul wrote to Timothy in his second Epistle, "From a child, you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is useful for teaching for correcting for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Scripture bears witness to its truthfulness, its power, its saving work. It is not something that can be proven, it is something that God the Holy Spirit must convince us of as he works in our hearts. The truth is self-authenticating. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself does the same as he prays, "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth." For it is in God's word that you find the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

In the 11:00 a.m. service on Sunday we will receive four people into membership by Adult Confirmation. They have attended classes and have been instructed in the truths of God's word. What a blessing it is to have the opportunity to hear the word, to be taught by it. To find in it the truths of God and his saving work. So if that is the case, why does it appear that so many take it for granted or do not avail themselves of the opportunity to grow in the word? Where is everyone when it comes to hearing the truth of God? Have our lives become so full of other "stuff" that we have no place for the truth of God? Or, God forbid, is it just one of many things that have taken a place in our lives? Or is it the sign that in the latter days men's heart will grow cold and in the words of St. Paul, they will wander from the truth and follow after myths?

Conclusion

In sharp contrast to those thoughts, what blessings we have as God's own people. People sanctified in the truth. We have been set apart, called saints, redeemed, sanctified in the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. And his own word of truth reminds us of that. May we ever pray:

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust
Leave me not helpless in the dust
Nor let me be confounded.
But in thy word, my faith, O Lord,
be always firmly grounded.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.