

## John 17:11b-19

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

May is the month of graduations. Across the United States schools are finishing their academic years and commencement exercises are being held. Many universities have already conducted their graduations. High schools will be graduating within the next weeks. And today we will graduate the members of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and kindergarten classes here at Trinity Lutheran School.

During these graduation exercises the commencement speakers often talk about our world and how things are changing. At other times the graduation speakers talk about the need for change in our world. Change is a topic, however, that is not limited to graduations. Change is frequently on our minds

The world needs to change. Many people agree with that statement and for good reason. You merely have to read the paper or watch the news on television to agree that the world does need to change. We would say that there is too much crime and too little morality in our world. That's got to change, we say, if our world isn't going to explode or decay. But how realistic is that? How is the world going to change? Many people feel that we're beyond the point of no return. It's too late. We just need to wait for Jesus to come and call a halt to this world.

Is it really too late? Jesus says in the text for today, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (v 15). This is a big clue for us about the world and about change. The world can change, but only Jesus can bring about that change. Our text comes from Jesus' High Priestly prayer. The High Priest in the Old Testament offered prayers and sacrifices on behalf of God's people. The Lord Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, paying for our sins. But Jesus hasn't stopped working for us. Today, graduates and non-graduates alike, know this: **"Your High Priest Prays for You."**

This portion of the Gospel of John records a prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father right before his arrest in the garden. Jesus is specifically praying for his disciples then and in turn for us today. People tend to think that the past is better than the present, but the world back then needed to change too. The Gospel message which details what Jesus has done needed to work its way into the lives of many people. It was up to the disciples to carry on the work that Jesus had started. Jesus knew that he would soon ascend into heaven. He would not be a physical, visible presence with them for the long haul. Jesus is praying, "Father, help them be the kind of people that we need them to be. Help them be strong witnesses of the Gospel. Help them change the world."

Jesus knew that the job would be very hard. The disciples were to be in the world, yet they were not to be of the world. This was a very hard balance to maintain. These disciples were regular people and they had ordinary faults. They were ambitious to the point of fighting against one another. They were politically minded; they wanted rewards for their hard work. They got tired; they were tempted by the luxuries of the world. But they also had several powerful things on their side. They had Jesus as their teacher and they had his Word. They had prayer. And they had the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result they did change their world by the Word and how they lived their lives in love for one another. Slowly, day by day, they attracted others to Jesus' love. Jesus' prayer for his disciples did not go unanswered. The boldness with which the disciples proclaimed the message of a Savior from sin and the spread of that message were indications that the heavenly Father heard the prayer of his Son and took action.

Whether you are a graduate or will soon be a graduate or whether graduation is years in the future or many years in the rearview mirror, we all have something in common. Like those original disciples of Jesus, we are to be in the world but not of the world. This is still a hard balance to maintain. We want to be part of the world, yet if we are truly Christians, the world hates us. Is that an overstatement or is that the truth? When was the last time you felt hated by the world? If you don't, you should feel that way. In more and more ways the world

demonstrates that it doesn't agree with God. God decides what is wrong and what is right. We don't make the rules and then change those rules for living whenever we want to.

Wrong is wrong, even if everyone does it. Yet we so easily get pulled in by the world. "The government doesn't need all that money; go ahead and cut corners on your taxes." "Television isn't so bad these days; quit being such a spoilsport." "Go ahead and drive five miles over the speed limit; they let you do it anyway." "Live together without the benefit of marriage. It's better to do a trial run than to make a permanent mistake." Wrong can become so normal in our lives that it ceases to be wrong. In sinful minds wrong can even become right. Righteousness cannot help but hate evil. That may be true, but we like to negotiate with evil. We like to rationalize the evil actions in our lives. "It's not really a lie; I just left out some parts."

Jesus knows that living in the world is hard for us. Jesus knows our sins and our failures. That is what the cross and the empty tomb of Easter is all about—forgiveness, strength, and encouragement to keep going. Jesus prays that we not be taken out of this world because there is work to be done and we are the ones to do it. And not only that—Jesus trusts us to do his work. The world needs to be changed. The world can change one little bit at a time. The world needs to see the difference God can make in the world through his people. We need to answer his call, and oftentimes that means seeking what appears to be the hard road and putting ourselves and our comfort on the line for the Gospel. It means sacrifice so that others may know the truth of Jesus.

How do we know that we're not acting like the rest of the world? How do we live in the world, use it, yet not bow down to it or be swept away by it? It's an everyday, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute battle in our lives. How will my actions or my decisions affect my life as a Christian? How will my actions or my decisions affect how others view my life as a Christian person? How do I use my Christian liberty to further the Gospel in this world? It's a one-step-at-a-time, one-decision-at-a-time, one-victory-at-a-time life.

But it's a victory—hard-fought as it is. It's a victory Christ won for us. Jesus was in the world, struggling against the world, that we would no longer be of the world that we would not perish with the world. Jesus was hated by the world, rejected by the world, killed by the world, so that someday we *could* be taken out of this world—to eternal glory that's out of this world.

For now, we are in the world, but, in our Baptism, we are also in Christ, so that everything he won during his earthly sojourn already belongs to us. And so, reading his Word, partaking of the Sacraments, proclaiming his Word to others, we start to clean up our little corner of the world.

Brothers and sisters, fellow believers – until Jesus comes again, we have work to do. We have the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel. We are in the world, but not of the world. We are in Christ, and being in Christ—while still being in the world—is all we need to change the world.

Graduates, even though you don't want to admit it, graduation can be a bit frightening. We don't know what to expect at the next level – whether that's first grade or high school or a career in the working world. Life is no less stressful for those of us who are not graduating this year. There is not one of us who knows exactly what tomorrow has in store for us. We know the outline the Lord has prepared but we don't know all the details. Yet we can be confident. The Lord Jesus assures us that we do not go forward alone. Our High Priest continues to pray for us, just as he prayed for his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. With the Lord's blessing and with his power working in us, God changes us and through us the Lord makes a change in the world around us. To make a difference, we need Jesus. Stay close to him. Amen.

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Easter 7 – Graduation Sunday

Pastor James Korthals  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
1268 Pleasant Valley Road  
West Bend, Wisconsin