The Church in the World

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[0:00] As we turn to God's Word this morning, I want to begin with a question, and the question is this. What is the Christian's place in the world? How do we fit as a church in the broader society that we live in? There have been lots of models throughout the year. There were seasons where monasteries were very popular and communities were drawn away from society. There are places where there have been state churches overseen in parishes that covered everybody and many, many other models. Moravian communities, countercultural communes, and pillars of the community, etc., etc. There have been lots of models, and they have risen because the church has asked itself the question, what is our place? Do we become a part of the world? Do we distinguish ourselves from the world? How do we navigate this? And it's an important question to ask because history has shown that when taken to extremes, the church has lost its way. At times, we've become indistinguishable in belief and practice from the culture around us, so like the world that it's hard to know the difference between a church and a social club. At other times, we've retreated into an alternate society so removed that we have no opportunity to live out the commands to love our neighbor in any meaningful way. Friends, it is this question that Jesus was looking forward to as he prayed for his disciples in John 17. This is what we're looking at as we continue in our series in the Gospel of John. We're looking in John 17. It's page 903 in the Pew Bibles.

John 17, starting in verse 6, is our passage. And Jesus is now the night before he will be crucified. He is praying for his disciples in particular in this passage. He knows that he is going to leave them and go to the Father. He sees the cross ahead of him, and he knows that the challenges that will lie ahead for his church. And so he prays for them, and he prays for us in our passage today.
So if you will read along with me, we're going to read this passage and then pray for God's help, and then we're going to look at it for a few minutes. John 17, starting in verse 6.
I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of this world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you, for I have given them the words that you gave me. And they have received them, and they have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.
And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.
[3:34] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.
Let's pray together. Lord, we ask for your help this morning as we look at this word. Lord, we pray that you would open our minds to give us understanding, and you would open our hearts to receive the truth of your word, and that by your spirit you would transform us. Lord, that we might know the place that you have given us in this world, and how we are to live in light of that.
Lord, I pray for your help this morning. Lord, that you would give me words to speak that would bless us as a church. Lord, that you would apply your word to all of our hearts. We pray this in

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Jesus' name.
[5:15] Amen. Amen. We're going to look briefly at the context of this prayer, and then we're going to talk about the content of the prayer that Jesus gives this morning. So first, one of the things that is clear in this passage is that the context of the church's place in the world is to live in a world that opposes us.

There is a constant distinction that Jesus makes. They are not of this world, just as I am not of the world. He continues to say, he says this in verse 6, you gave them out of this world. In verse 11, I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. And then in verse 16 and also 14, they are not of this world. There is a distinction that Jesus is making. There are two categories of people. There are those who are Christ's, and there are those who are in the world. This is consistent with what John has said about what the world means generally. When he uses the word world in his gospel, he means particularly the systems, the structures, the societal communities that stand in opposition to or in rebellion against God. That is how John uses the word world. So in John 3.16, when he said, God so loved the world, it's not just that he loved his creation, but that he loved his rebellious creation is what John is saying there. And so Jesus is saying there is a distinction. There is a world that is in rebellion against God, but you have given me people out of them. The church and the disciples as the beginning, the down payment of what we are now as the church, we are meant to be different people distinct from the world that we live in. And then in verse 14, we see clearly, that not only is this a relationship of distinction, but that there is a opposition that comes from the world. Verse 14 says that the world will hate the church and the followers of Jesus because they have believed his word. Jesus has said this in other places. In John 15.18, he told his disciples, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Why is this true? It is true because when God calls us into his church, when God calls us to be his people, he lays a new foundation for our very being. Our ultimate authority is different. No longer do I trust my own rationality. No longer do I trust my own sense of right or wrong. No longer do I look to the wisdom of humans to be the ultimate arbiter, but I look to
God and to his word. So I have an ultimate authority that is different than the world. I also have ultimate goals that are different. No longer do I live for my own self-preservation or for my own joy or for my own pleasure, but I live to glorify God. I live to know him and to make him known.
Our ultimate identity is now transformed. All of the human identities that we have, our race and our gender and our family and all of these things, which in the world become primary and often result in tribalism and comparison and competition and conflict, those are all fundamentally subjugated to a greater identity. We are either in God's family or we are not.
And when we are in God's family by God's grace, we humbly know that that is where we are. And who we are for eternity.
[9:35] We'll talk more about this, but recognize that this is a distinction then that Jesus is saying, this difference then causes hatred from the world. What does this look like? When I was in college, I did a lot of research into the missionary Hudson Taylor, who was a pioneering missionary in China in the 18th century.

Nope, not in the 1800s. Sorry, sometimes I confuse us. 1800s. And one of the most remarkable things is that Hudson Taylor did everything that he knew how to do everything that he knew how to accommodate the Chinese culture and to meet the Chinese culture where it could while proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in a culture that had a very different worldview.
And do you know, the hatred that came back, it was almost nonsensical. Missionaries were accused of eating babies and stealing children and all sorts of witchcraft and crazy things because they saw that these men and women were different and they didn't know how to navigate it.
And so they had this response of hatred that resulted in violence and persecution and martyrdom. But it was very real. Now, we might say, well, that doesn't happen in our 21st century with our tolerant society.
But I tell you, that's not true. Because I know some, and there may be some here in this room, who having decided to actually follow Jesus, having chosen to place their trust in him, have been disowned by their families. They've not been talked to for years because of the way that they have chosen to follow Jesus. Simply because they have broken ranks with the family loyalties, the ethnic identities, the religious social identities that they've been on. They have received great hatred,

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ostracization, and anger in response.
[11:50] Friends, it continues today. We live in a world that does not love God or his ways or his word. And we as a church need to recognize this is the context in which he calls us to take our place in the world.

And this is what Jesus prays for. In the context of a world that hates us, how are we to be? How… And I think that Jesus, there's a lot in this prayer. I'm not going to cover everything exhaustively, but there were three things that I saw that were really clear in this prayer that I just want to highlight quickly.
Ways that Jesus prayed for his disciples and for us by extension, how they will live in the world after he leaves them. And the first thing, you can look at me in verse 14 or in verse 17, in verse 17, is that Jesus says, these people are set apart because they have received the word that I have given them.
Right? So verse 14 says, I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of this world. Verse 17 says, sanctify them in your truth. Sanctifying, this word, means to set apart, to be distinctive in certain ways.
Sanctify them by your truth. And Jesus is given… is reminding us through his prayer that the distinctive foundation that we have as a Christian church is the word of God.
[13:29] Right? And the word of God in the Gospel of John is a really rich concept because remember John 1 where Jesus said… Where John was writing the prologue and he says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

So the first thing we need to see is that the word of God is Jesus himself. And it is also the words that he has given us. And we see that in verse… Oh, where is it?
I forgot to put that in my notes. All right, study on your own. It's in there somewhere. That it's not only the word, but also the words that he has given them. So it's not just his person, but it's also his teaching that then has become codified and handed down to us in the Bible.
And Jesus is praying, saying, I have given them the foundation for this new identity in the world. And it is the word of God. It is the person of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus about God himself, humanity, and salvation that we now have in the Bible.
And he says, these people are set apart. These who have followed me are set apart because they have not only heard my word, but they have received it. They have not simply become aware that it is there, but they have taken it in and said, yes, I will submit myself to this.
[14:53] I will obey it. I will agree with it. I will follow it. I will seek to understand it. And ultimately, I will trust in it even when I don't understand it.

So when Jesus prays for his disciples to be distinct in the world, he prays that the word would be central. And so we ask our question to ourselves, are we distinctive in this way?
Do we receive and understand and believe and trust that Jesus is the Son of God come to be the Savior of the world for all who believe in him?
And that the Bible is the word of God, our authority which tells us about who God is and who Jesus is and how we are to respond to him and how we are to live in light of that?
Do we not only know these things, but do we treasure them in our hearts? Do we love them and value them?
[15:57] Or are they things that we grudgingly accept because we think we have to out of duty? So that's the first thing Jesus prays about is the giving of the word as a foundation.

The second thing that Jesus prays for is that God would keep us. If you look through this passage over and over again, this word keep, and I was trying to think through, like, where does this come up?
And I was thinking, oh, the first Noel. Remember in fields where they lay keeping their sheep. Right? So this is the picture. It is like a shepherd keeping a flock of sheep.
What does a shepherd have to do? He protects them from enemies. He provides for their needs. He leads them to green pastures and still waters. He is responsible for their well-being and their security.
And if you look through these passages, there are a number of places where you see Jesus prays, keep them in your name, keep them reminded and knowing that their primary identity is no longer whatever their human identities were before, their achievements, their accomplishments, their backgrounds, whatever it is, but that their identity would be in Christ.

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[17:14] That they would say that the word Christian is such a sweet identity marker for them because it means I am in the name of Jesus. And that this is what it means for those who put their faith in Christ.

We are now a part of his family. We take his name. And we are part of it together. And interestingly, in verse 11, it says, keep them in your name which you have given me that they may be one even as we are one.
And that means that we're able to look at one another in the church who profess the name of Christ and say we are one together in the same family. And just like our family, we don't always agree on every detail.
We don't always get along in easily ways. But we are a part of a family. And Jesus prays that we would be one. And Nick is going to go after this really strongly next week, so I'm not going to unpack it completely.
But this unity is one of the things. And then secondly, in verse 13, that there's a joy that comes from this. I know whose I am. I know where I fit in this world.
[18:23] I no longer have to spend my life building, choosing, or deciding my identity. Because God has given me one in Christ. What great joy that is.

So Jesus prays, keep them in my name. The second thing he says is keep them in faith.
Keep them in believing. This is the contrast in verse 12. Jesus says, I have kept them. I have kept all of them that they've continued to believe except the one who has failed.
The one who has turned away. And Jesus knew that following him would be hard. He never shied away from that reality. He calls us to follow him anyway.
To be fully believing and fully following in him. Knowing that there will be obstacles and opposition from the world. Knowing that there will be temptations to turn away to an easier path.
[19:24] To a more, to greater control over our identity. To greater acceptance from our peers. That there are lots of easy ways to compromise with the world.

Or to become following the ways of the world. Jesus knows that there will be great temptations for all these things. But he prays that God would keep them from falling into those.
That he would keep them unlike Judas. Judas who at the end of the day chose to disbelieve what Jesus had said about himself. And turned him over.
Judas who in Psalm 41.9 was predicted to be one of those who were close to the Savior. And yet who turned away. Jesus.
Jesus. Jesus says, there is one who did turn away. But I pray that God would keep you so that you would not turn away like that.
[20:28] Finally, Jesus says in verse 15. That he would keep us from the evil one. We don't often talk about these sorts of things in our rationalistic 21st century day.

But the Bible is consistent in its witness. That there is a real spiritual power that is active in this world. And it is in opposition.
Right? And we talk about the things that array themselves against Christians. Faithfully following Jesus. The world, the flesh, and the devil. Right? The world is what John is talking about. A system and structure that ignores God.
The flesh is our own internal instinct. To disobey and to be independent from and to be self-dependent. To reject God's authority in our lives.
And there is a third one. And it is the devil. There are spiritual forces that come after our soul. And he is like, as Peter says, a prowling lion.
[21:28] Seeking to destroy us. Seeking to draw us away. Seeking to overwhelm us with temptation. Seeking to drive us to fear as the power of darkness is on display in this world.

Seeking to divide us by whispers and lies and different ways in which he might attack the unity of our church.
Friends, we need to recognize that there is this reality out there. But then Jesus has said, pray that you would keep them from the evil one.
We have a greater power than this power in the world. The power of the creator of the universe. And that God is able to keep us. And Jesus is affirming that and saying, will you do that, Lord? Will you, Heavenly Father, Holy Father, the one who is set apart from this world, will you keep your people from his power so that he might not have ultimate victory over our hearts?

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[22:37] So, if the foundation is the word of God and the second part of Jesus' prayer is this prayer that God would keep us distinct and yet in this world, in the midst of all of these challenges, keeping us in things, keeping us from things, then what is our commission that Jesus prays for?

This is verse 18. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And remember that Jesus has already prayed in verses 1 through 5 that Tom explicated last week for us so well, that Jesus has prayed that God would glorify Jesus Christ in his suffering and in his resurrection. This is Jesus' great goal. This is why Jesus came, is that God would glorify him by following this path. And so, when Jesus says, just as I have been sent in the world to glorify myself through this work of salvation, so also I am sending them to glorify me by making known this good news, by bearing witness to who Jesus is and what he has done.
This is the distinctive call of the church. This is the place that we have, right? We are sent into a fallen world not to escape it.
Jesus says that explicitly. I am not asking that you would remove them from the world, but that you would keep them in it, right? And this leads us to this grand formulation that many of us have heard. [24:17] What does it mean for us to be in the world but not of it? And this is the question that I started with at the beginning, how the church has wrestled with, how do we engage with the world without becoming like it?

Romans 12.2 has a similar prayer or command to us that we would not be conformed to this world, that is shaped by it, put into the mold of the world, so that our thoughts and our actions and our patterns and our behavior and our character value and display the things that the world displays. We would not be conformed in that way, but that we would be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that as we are transformed from the inside out by the knowledge of Christ, we increasingly take on our new family identity, and we increasingly become Christians, people who display the character and the values and the worldview of Christ.
This is what God has called us to, and it's not easy. But going back to the beginning of what I said earlier about the world, it means that we will have a different identity.
It means we will have a different goal. It means that our ends and our means are shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ, by a trust in a sovereign and good God who oversees all of the world, by the belief that mercy and grace will triumph, and that justice will prevail as we live in this world. [26:04] There is much, much, much to say about this, but God has called us to live sent into this world, but not being of it.

So we need to ask ourselves the question, how are we doing with that today? When I think about the patterns of my life and what I do in my daily schedule, does it reflect the values of God and His kingdom?
Do I love people well? Do I study His Word? Do we worship together as a family or as a community of friends, not only here on Sunday but during the week? Do I engage with my work wherever it may be, whether it be at school or at home or in a workplace?
Do I engage in my work not simply to be successful but to please God? Do I engage in my relationships not merely for self-enjoyment, but to serve, to love, to draw others to Christ, to help them know the mercy and grace, to encourage fellow believers in steadfastness and faith, to carry one another's burdens, and so on and so forth.
Friends, how are we doing this morning? The good news, however, is that in this verse, verse 18, we see that we have not only a command but a model because Jesus has come into the world. [27:43] He came to a world that, if you remember in John 1, 9 through 11, He came to the world that He created, but it did not know Him and it rejected Him. But He came in love to be a Savior.

Think of some of the stories we've seen in the Gospel of John. Think about His encounter with Nicodemus at night, helping this Pharisee to understand the ways of God, the way He came along with compassion alongside the Samaritan woman at the well and showed her that there was a greater solution to her thirst than the well of Jacob.
The way He came alongside the one who was longing for healing and hope in the pool of Bethsaida. And Jesus came and He said, I will make you well. And He healed him and He gave him new life.
Friends, we know that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. Beginning with us, He came to seek and save us.

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And now that He has shown us that and called us into Himself, He has then shown us as well His, not only by His mission, but also by His character and by His worldview.
[29:00] How He treated every person with dignity as created in God's image. How He spoke with authority about God and showed that His words were from God.

How He lived such a good life that even when the people who hated Him sought to find something to hate Him for, the only thing that they could find was that His loyalty would not be given to a human ruler.
That was His greatest offense. Jesus lived such a life as an example for us. And so if you say, I want to be like this and I don't know how, here's the solution.
Go and study the life of Jesus. Go and read the Gospels. See how He loved people. And ask the Lord to help you to be an imitator of Him.
Verse 19 says, For their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth. If you look at the ESV footnotes, it's a really odd translation because the word consecrate and the word sanctify are actually the same word.
[30:20] Jesus is saying, As I have set myself apart in order for their sake. And by that He's talking about His salvific work for them.

He then says, On that basis, may they be sanctified, set apart by the truth of knowing what I have done by that and believing in it.
So friends, this brings us to the Gospel because this is the power. If our Christianity is not based in the finished work of Christ, if it is based on loving our community or finding a common cause that we think is worthwhile, or if we've just come to the place where we think, Yeah, this seems better than other things.
I'll try it out for a while. Friends, we won't be able to live out the place that God has intended for His people in this world. But the Gospel says that when we believe in Christ, when we recognize our sin and our fallenness, that we are a part of this world, then we need to be rescued from it.
And when we put our faith in Christ and Jesus rescues us and gives us this new identity and this new purpose, there is power there for us to live out the calling.
[31:40] Jesus prays this, not thinking that His disciples will fail, but knowing that God will succeed in keeping them and sending His church to make Him known until He returns.

May it be so here at Trinity. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for this Word.
Lord, we thank You for Jesus' prayer for us. And Lord, we pray. We pray that You would help us to be women and men who live not of this world, but who know that we are sent into this world to make known the glorious grace that You have shown us in Jesus Christ.
Lord, that this is our mission. This is our place. Lord, keep us from becoming like the world. Help us to be wise and shrewd and discerning.
Lord, we pray that as we pursue this mission, Lord, that You would give us Your great love for this fallen world, for all the ways that, Lord, in spite of all the ways that it rejects You, Lord, give us a love for our world so that we might be able to, in grace, proclaim Your good news.
[33:09] Lord, we thank You and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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