

Pastor Colleen's Sermon of May 24, 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

We all know how it feels when we are somewhere we feel like we don't belong.

For example, when I am in Home Depot ...
it doesn't matter that I can say "3/4 inch anti-siphon valve with union"
I have no idea what that is... or how to install one...or where one would even install that!
And worse yet... even if I could ask one of the salespeople where to find one...
THEY will know I have no idea what I'm asking for...
Clearly in that store I usually look like someone who does not belong.

Or... if you've ever seen me in the city... it's the same thing...
I'm a suburban/country gal...
In the city I am looking up at buildings...
I can literally spin in circles trying to figure out if I'm supposed to be walking uptown or
downtown,
I have no idea what a block is versus a street....
In the city I am somewhere I don't belong...

And then there was the time in Seminary where one of my classes had to go to a Mosque. .
I had to put a scarf on my head to cover my head,
The women in my class had to separate from the men...
We had to go and wash before we could enter into the worship space
We had to stay upstairs and the men were allowed to go into the worship space with the Iman
While the experience was great and I learned a lot about the Muslim religion...
And while Muslims find these rituals perfectly normal and comforting,
Clearly, because I did not know how to act, or what to say, or how to pray,
I felt out of place and felt I didn't belong.

We all know how it feels when we're somewhere we don't belong.
We know because one of the most fundamental human needs is
the need to feel at home with ourselves and our surroundings.
There is no greater desire than to know to whom we belong and that we are not an impostor
there,
but utterly and completely at home.
Every religious tradition responds in some way to this fundamental need for identity.

Even we as Lutherans have our own way of speaking, of praying, of feeling we belong...
For example when I say,
The peace of the Lord be with you....
You say... and also with you...

Here at LCR those who are members or who have been attending for a while know

that when you kneel at the communion rail and you want to take communion from the little cups instead of the chalice you have to cross your arms...or signal the communion asst. in some way that you want the cups and not the chalice.

And here at LCR we know that during the sharing of the peace,
It is more than ok to come out of your pew and walk down the aisle to share the peace of God with everyone...

It feels good when we feel we belong.

In this morning's gospel,
The prayer that Jesus prays is to help us know **to whom** we belong.
It is a prayer of incredible intimacy.
In this prayer Jesus is praying for his disciples... right in front of his disciples...
He is not off somewhere praying by himself...
He is right there in the middle of them... praying FOR them.
There is no more intimate a moment.

Think about this.

Have you ever had the experience of someone praying for you when you were right there to listen?

As a pastor I pray with people all the time and I have always found the experience to be quite powerful.

But I have also been on the receiving end and had people pray for me while I was there.

And I have always found these moments to be intimate and transformational.

It is one thing to hear someone say, "I'm praying for you."

But to have someone stop... bow their head and offer words of prayer on MY behalf... with me right there...

Well that always moves me and makes me take a deep breath.

So imagine the disciples...

They had always wanted in on Jesus' prayer life:

you couldn't miss his passionate intimacy with God,

and they had said probably more than once, "Lord, teach us to pray."

But this night...

in the shadows...on his last night on earth...

Jesus wasn't teaching them to pray, but he was praying for them--right in front of them.

And Jesus, aware that these are his final hours, prays to God:

"I am no longer in this world, but they are."

This must have confused the disciples,

these dark hints... this cryptic language,

and they no doubt would have clung to him if they had really understood.

But Jesus' words are not so cryptic to us today...

We hear Jesus and know that while Jesus is no longer in the world, we are.

Jesus' body is no longer here, but Jesus' body is very much here.
Because we are the body of Christ.

Teresa of Avila said,

"Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out on a hurting world, yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is to bless now."

We are the body of Christ and therefore we are commissioned by Christ to act as the body of Christ

And on most days that can feel like a tall order.

Some days we may wish Jesus had left his future presence down here in more capable hands than ours!

Because face it, we're just not all that special.

We feel no miraculous power coursing through our veins,
we're tired, we're stressed,

we're just so very....human.

Had I been in that room with Jesus on the night of this prayer I might have interrupted him and asked some questions...

especially when he said to God,

"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..."

WHOA Jesus... wait a second... we don't like it when we feel like we don't belong.

We don't want out of the world, because we're very much in it, up to our necks as it turns out.

We're in the world, and of the world, as best I can tell.

Because even though we try not to be materialistic... we are

We try to have only holy, God centered thoughts... but the world creeps in.

We try to live only Christ like lives... but we fail miserably all the time.

We are in the world, and of it, and we can't seem to extricate ourselves.

Hearing these words from Jesus that night might have been confusing for the disciples

And hearing them today can feel just as confusing, and overwhelming.

But since we are a Resurrection people... we can sit back in our pews and hear these words as they were intended.

Not as a challenge

Not as a commandment

But as a prayer

Jesus was talking to God, he was praying.

FOR US!

And I think that's part of the good news of this gospel

That we can, like Jesus, come before God in prayer

Asking God to help us,
 To lead us,
 To take care of us.

Asking God to help us be in but not of the world.
 Asking God to teach us to be Christ's body in this world...

Today we hear Jesus praying sincerely and passionately for those he loved...
 Today we hear Jesus praying for us...
 And as Jesus laid his concerns, hopes and fears before God...
 We know we can lay our prayers and concerns,
 hopes and fears on the altar of God's heart...
 At the foot of the cross of Jesus...

And the other part of the good news of this gospel is that Jesus' prayer... for us... gives us a picture of what belonging to God really looks like.
 How belonging to God... being God's children... means **we never don't belong**.
 It means we always have a place where we can feel comfortable...
 Where we can feel at home.

Today's gospel gives us a picture of what real belonging looks like,
 today we hear Jesus praying for us.
 We hear Jesus praying that the community be protected from evil;
 that the community be unified;
 that the community fulfill Jesus' joy;
 and that the life of the church be distinct from the life of the world.

Jesus knew the challenges of living in this world,
 its disappointments, even its hostility.
 Jesus knew there would be certain aspects of this world that would be difficult to live in...
 but this is where we are and this is what we have.
 At times we may feel betrayed or hurt by the world,
 and we may be disappointed by those with whom we are in community,
 but we have not been betrayed by nor will we be disappointed by God.
 We live "in between" the world we know and love and the one that is yet to appear,
 but we are not alone.
 We have a God who loves us,
 a redeemer who prays for us,
 and we also have one another.

We all know how it feels when we're somewhere we don't belong.
 It often feels isolating, frightening, and lonely...
 Jesus' prayer in John's gospel is for us all,
 It is to help us remember our identity as children of God.
 It is to help us know one another as the body of Christ.
 The prayer of Jesus is that we may know to whom we belong.

May we enter into prayer this day with our Lord and Savior.

May we see through Easter eyes the new life we've been given through Christ's death and resurrection.

And may we rest in the assurance that we belong to God and to one another.

Amen

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen