

**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**John 17:6-19**  
**Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear**

**St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA**  
**May 24, 2009**

## **Belonging in the World**

Each one of us is identified by our name. Do you know where your name came from? What is the significance of your name? Names are powerful. Parents spend a great amount of time choosing names for their children. My mother had this brilliant idea that all her children would have the same initials, well that worked for the first three then she ran out of 'JLG' combinations. My two youngest brothers are 'KEG's'. Some names are taken from beloved family members and passed down from generation to generation. Sometimes names fit like a kid glove and other times a name can seem too big or completely wrong for the person who bears it. I am named after my father. As a young boy, I was known as 'Jimmy'. Sometime after high school, I became 'Jim, Jr.' to my family. Names can be a blessing or names can be a curse. Names, when well given, provide the one named, with a powerful connection to previous generations as well as hope for the future. The biblical witness is full of examples of the power of naming and names.

In our gospel lesson today, John reveals a high priestly prayer Jesus prays to his Father on the last night with his disciples on behalf of his followers. This prayer falls into three parts – prayer for himself as he faces death for the sake of the world, for his followers, and for the church. Jesus prays his disciples will experience unity, joy, protection, and success in mission. This prayer extends to us across time and space, and we are, according to Jesus, protected in his name. The protection and covering Jesus is talking about is not just against evil and all that would work us harm, although that intent is clear. No, this protection has far greater significance; in Jesus' name we are united as one in the body of Christ to do his work in this world. In Christ and through our baptism we have been powerfully claimed and named.

You are sealed with the cross of Christ forever. Let your light so shine before others so they can see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Jesus tells his Father the world has hated him and his followers, because they do not belong to the world. The world desires you be of it. God who is more powerful has you where you are to be, in the world to further the kingdom of God; to proclaim the mighty deeds of God through His Son Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who came into the world to intercede for our sins and now seeks to be reunited with his Father in heaven, but not before asking his Father to protect us just as he protected Jesus while on earth.

Jesus is no longer in the world, but we are. An immense sadness hangs over the surviving disciples, and really over us, who probably feel on our own down here with Jesus not in this world. We wish Jesus' body were still on this earth—but then this very wish gets transformed into our vocation, our commissioning. Jesus' body is no longer here, but Jesus' body is very much here. 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." In the name of Jesus we are empowered and emboldened to share the good news, to care for the weak and the marginalized,

to steward God's good creation, and to gather together for our chief act of worship and praise. We do not do this alone; we do it in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A lot of name dropping goes on in our culture – names of the rich, important, and famous roll off tongues like golden honey. The power of carefully dropped names help cement deals, secure jobs, and seek relationships. Names surround us in all we do. Look at the 'name brands' we find in advertising. Did you know that each one of us is hit each day with an average of 5000 advertising brands? It may be in brand name clothes, the kind of car you drive, the food you purchase, names are a part of the world. Christians, ironically, have access to the most powerful name of all - Jesus, and yet we probably "drop it" or claim it the least. Think about this the next time you offer your prayers in Jesus' name, and then go forth to live in the amazing power and grace that name imparts. How often when you pray do you end with similar words, "in Jesus' name we pray"? You, dear Christian friend, are claimed, named, and sent in the name of Jesus to proclaim the good news in the world.

Jesus offers this prayer to the Father for the whole church. He acknowledges that all whom Jesus cares for are God's and he has protected them in the world filled with suffering. It is Jesus' desire to be one with the Father, and asks that God continue to protect them in the world from the evil one - A life that is dark, a life filled with hatred, a life that struggles for answers. Jesus has done his best to convey the message of gratitude for all God has given, and to be generous in giving to others, namely the love of God that is for all people. Protection from the ills of the world that take life away is what Jesus asks on our behalf. The final verses of this passage, they, you and I in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, do not belong to the world, just as Jesus did not either. We are God's people claimed and called to proclaim the name of Jesus on every heart. God sets us apart in the world to know truth, the truth that comes from the word of God. Just as God sent Jesus into the world so we are sent into the world sanctified in truth to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

That my brothers and sisters in Christ is a tall order! To pass on to present and future generations the saving power of God's grace, love and mercy for all people leaves us feeling a sense of powerlessness, a sense of inadequacy, a question of 'why me Lord?' Yet knowing that our work is done in the name of Jesus Christ empowers us to share boldly. How about we begin by sharing our gratitude for what God has given. One of our contemporary problems is that we've come to see the good things of life as an entitlement, rather than a gift. We have lost the sense of wonder and surprise that gives birth to true thankfulness. Look in the eyes of a child when he or she opens a birthday or Christmas gift; the joy and excitement of discovering something new just for them. When we are given a gift, we feel joy; and gratitude is the experience that flows from that joy. Focusing on the gifts we have been given, rather than wishing for others beyond our reach, creates contentment. Because the disciples received the resurrection of Jesus as pure gift, they felt tremendous gratitude and contentment, and they blessed God continually.

Another way to pass on to others in the name of Jesus is through generosity, shaped by conversations centered around the acknowledgement of our gifts. Too often we keep decisions about our charitable giving to ourselves, and treat them as a private matter. Why not discuss giving as a family, and involve children in decisions about where the family generosity will go?

I am not talking only of financial generosity. What about your time? Yes, all of us have busy lives in the world. If we are truly OF the world, the time we spend with others is invaluable. Getting to know someone different than ourselves, maybe visit a nursing home, or detention center, take a stranger to a park, offering a ride to an appointment – these are ways of being generous. Closer to home, maybe you are talented or skilled to make a building repair or share your faith in helping with worship roles. All are examples of generosity. Simple acts of faith bring generosity out of the shadows and teaches our children and each other what it means to give, instead of only being a recipient. Because the first Christians created a culture of generosity, there was not a need person among them.

Then there is love. An unconditional sharing of oneself just as Jesus loves us. We are called to do the same for and with others. This is the heart of Jesus' life and work: selfless love and service.

In her book *Unbinding the Gospel*, Martha Grace Reese stresses that when people look to the church, they are seeking to join with people whose lives are centered in a relationship with God. They're not looking for a social club! Prayer needs to be an important part of the life of any person who wants to spread the message of Jesus. People want to feel welcomed and accepted, to learn about God, and how to experience spiritual growth. They want forgiveness and new life that comes through a relationship with Jesus. The good news is that we can help people experience this kind of transformation, because we have been shaped by the teachings of Jesus and the disciples. When you name Jesus as Lord, and savior, you share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others.

In closing, I give thanks to God through Jesus Christ that I have been given this opportunity to worship with you, participate in ministry with you, to love and be loved by each of you and to experience the church at work in the world. My year with you has been filled with many opportunities and experiences that will continue to shape my ministry. I am grateful for your hospitality, even if no one introduced themselves the very first time I visited St. Peter's, for your companionship in ministry sharing joys and concerns together, for allowing me to discover who I am as a child of God. Your generosity of time, patience, fellowship, will follow me into the world. A world where God is proclaimed in the name of Jesus for all who believe.