

Prayer

This prayer of Jesus for his disciples always makes me think of the young people I have worked with over the years. It just happens to come this time on Youth Sunday, when we have a crop of kids, including my two, up here helping lead worship this morning. I have now been doing this long enough that some of the kids I first knew when they were this age are now full grown adults with families of their own. I have baptized them, taught them, played games and organized projects with them, I have seen them grow up and launch out into the world, and it is amazing, and terrifying. The more you really care about a kid the more the idea of them out there in the world just scares you. There's always that balance, I want them to get out there and live and find the good things that the world has to offer, but then again, I know full well at my age what a horrible place the world can be.

Jesus knew that this job of being his disciple wasn't going to be easy or safe for the ones he was sending, in fact he knew that one of them had already failed, whether it was simple greed or worldly ambition is debated, but Judas failure clearly stung Jesus, even as he was in the process of forgiving. This is not an easy prayer to pray for people you care about, sending them out into a world that is so uncertain. I feel this as a parent too, I wonder what this world is going to be like for our young folks. Human history teaches us that the problems of human society are pretty consistent: violence, greed, lust for power, poverty and oppression of the least by the powerful. As much as I would sort of like to believe that at some time in the past that wasn't true and what we see today is just a devolution caused by Television or the Internet, it's actually not. I know a little too much about history to think that (just a little too much mind you).

Cate turns thirteen this Summer and 100 years ago or so, it would have been about high time to get her married off. Jack is going to be 15 come December and 150 years ago, he probably would already be working in a factory or a mill somewhere. So sorry retrogrades and back-lookers, the world is not objectively worse for our kids than it used to be, especially if your kids are brown, or maybe a little outside the realm of "normal," in some way. But I will give you this: the world is a hard and dangerous place, it always has been, that's why Jesus prays this way for his disciples, who were grown men. He has given them a mission to be a different kind of community than the one the world creates.

In a world where the mantra is "Caesar is Lord," the disciples are going to say, "Jesus is Lord," instead, and that is going to run them into trouble. It's the same in a world where the mantra is "Make America Great Again," our community is still supposed to say, "Jesus is Lord." In a world where the mantra was "Keep Calm and Carry On," as the German bombs fell on London, the community of the Church is still supposed to say, "Jesus is Lord." This is not to say that you can't hold to some things in the world and value them, there are good things to hold to in the world as well as troubling things: "inalienable rights," "I have a dream," "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Sometimes the world gives you things that can inspire and draw you up and out of yourself and into something good and true. Sometimes the world actually allows Jesus to be Lord, but a lot of the time it does not.

That is where we come into the story Church. That is where these peculiar little communities that are called in Greek ekklesia come into their own. We raise our children to go into this world of uncertainty and even terror, without fear, because they know there is something deeper than fear to hold onto. The Pastor of one of an early ekklesia said this: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love."

Jesus said this: "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." This is what we're doing here, with these kids. I know it doesn't always look that serious, we teach them Bible stories, we do little crafts, we make them do things for this community and even be a part of a worship service now and then, we try to make them stay awake while I ramble on up here, but what we are really doing is exposing them to the Word, which is the truth, and as Jesus told us, a little bit of the Kingdom, a little bit of the truth that "Jesus is Lord," can sink in and grow and become something much, much bigger. We live in that hope, we live in that love that casts out fear. Don't be fooled by how humble this can look on the outside, it's a big deal.