

Seventh Sunday of Easter Sermon  
May 16, 2024

Jesus said, “I have made Your salvation known amongst those who are in this world. They belong to You and You gave them to me, and they are in me as I am in You.”

We hear these words and we may hear them in ways they are not meant to be heard. I in You and You in me, Jesus says. In this world, but no longer *of* this world. Complete, and yet, not complete. We are where we need to be, and not yet where we will be. These words are spoken plainly and they are meant to meet us where we are so that we may have the hope our Lord gives us.

I find that very few people who do not acknowledge that the world is in a very strange place. We see evil around us, yet there are also many things that are very good. We have a foot in this world, but we are called to another place. It is in all of our hearts. From the most fervent unbeliever to the one deep in faith, there is a longing for a world that is different, better, and perfect. This is not of our making, for the ‘what’ that calls us is in us all. It is that outside of us which is calling us to move from where we are to another place. You and I have heard the Word and so we understand that this is the Lord who calling us from where we are to Himself. Will we go? Will we actually leave behind the things that are behind us to go to the place where we live into the life He is offering us? This is the true call of faith. This is why we gather in this place. We, born of the earth, are called to Zion, the dwelling place of Almighty God.

In this world, we may reach a place of a little safety and the desire is to settle there. It is temporary. This life is temporary. Although we want to deny it, we know that it is true. What then? The offer is before us. Many see it and, like seeds that fall on rocky soil, the idea may bounce for a bit, but soon falls off on the wayside – and we go back to living in the way of the world. Our Lord has given us the words of eternal life. Where else can we go to answer the longing for a better place? This is not just an offering for a little while, but the truth of eternity. We were created to live forever. That is at the heart of all of our longings – for the good and the evil alike.

You do not belong here. I am not talking about this church, community, the nation, or even this world. This world has been corrupted by sin. We see the corruption. We have been corrupted. In this Covid year, we have seen what can happen. We become afraid because we want to live. But, is fear the only motivation that drives you? Yes, fear will cause us to move, but often we are driven to move in panic. We are fearing the wrong things when this happens. Above all things, the fear of the Lord will move us in the right direction. I do not have a death wish, but I know that life in this age will end in death. What then? Learn how to live. While there is life in you, learn what it means to live. This is the pursuit of living in the Lord.

I do not fear Covid. I respect what it can and has done, but I do not fear it. If, in one of the rounds that may come again, it takes me out, so be it, but I will not live in that fear. Prudent, yes, but not driven by fear of and in this world. Yes, I am to be respectful of my neighbor. They are where they are and only the Lord knows what that truly means. Many are afraid and in love for them, I am respectful of their fear. I am to love my neighbor such that they may be comforted with the only hope there is, and that is the hope that what our Lord has promised is what is before all who believe. Because Christ lives, I too shall live.

While we are in this world, what kind of people should we be? It is a wonderful thing that many of the necessary pieces are already here. Yes, this world is contentious and we know how to contend too. But we also know that coming before the Lord, seeking His guidance, and

walking in His ways are the best way to live life. His commandments reflect who He is, so we live seeking to be like the One who has called us to be like Christ. There is truth to the saying, "Practice makes perfect." Practice your righteousness before others as the Holy Spirit enables you and me so that we learn how to obey all that Jesus commanded. In this week, remembering the Ascension of our Lord, we are reminded of the Great Commission, given before He was taken up by the Father, to go out into all the world and share that the answer to the longing we all have is Jesus. He is our salvation. He is the source of life. Living in Him is true living.

Listen to the word. God has given us eternal life. Living life is in the Son. Apart from God is death. Many live death. You and I have been called from death to life. I often think of the creed when it says, "Living and the dead," that this not about physical life, but the reality of the difference between those who live in faith and those who live for themselves. For me, this is not about those who are asleep in the Lord, but about the many walking dead who are dead *to* the Lord. In the same way that John said, "I am writing to you who believe," so also, I am saying this to you who believe.

What is the aim? Jesus says it plainly, "That my joy may be complete in them." The "them" here, is us. He wants to complete our joy. It is one of the Spiritual fruits which are given to those who walk by faith.

Where do you belong? You belong right here, walking with the Lord, and seeking Him in all of His ways. We reach out into our community because this is what the Lord has commanded us to do. We learn how to love our neighbor, all of them, the way the Lord directs us to love them. It is not about having fond feelings for others, but about being a caring and serving community who seek to meet the needs (not the wants) so that others may have the opportunity to be prepared for eternity by Jesus.

Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified in truth. What does it mean to be sanctified? It means to be made holy? What does it mean to be holy? It means to be set apart. The being set apart here is not about being special, better, or even physically different than our neighbor. It means that we live the life of faith we have been given as we intentionally and willingly see ourselves conformed daily by the Holy Spirit in the image of Christ. This living puts into practice that things our Lord gives us to do as He shapes us into the kind of people He is making to dwell with Him in the Father's house forever.

I do not belong to this world. Neither do you. Neither does anybody, really. We all know that in our inner being. I have lived in many places and I can attest that they have all been wonderful in their own way, but that they were not home. My home is not in this world. Yet, as a sojourner in this age, I live where the Lord leads. So do you. When we strip away all things, the reality is the call of hope. Where is your hope? Is it for a better world? That is good, but it is not the final answer. Is it that humanity would somehow finally learn to live together in harmony? That is a wonderful idea, but with sin in the world, it is not going to happen. Is it that you simply are left alone to live the life you have? I understand that, but our Lord has called for us to love our neighbor and in so doing, brings us out of ourselves.

You have been called through the water of your baptism to journey through this life with Jesus. He beckons you to come and follow Him. He will make of you what He will, as He sets you apart for His purpose, conforming you to His image, and making you a child of the Heavenly Father. Jesus made Himself holy, sanctified, complete in this age for our sakes. He did this so that we too may be holy, sanctified and complete through Him. The Lord knows your heart, where you are, and the struggles you have. Join with Him in the adventure of faith and see what

He will do in your life. May your life be blessed this week in the presence of the Lord knowing that He who has redeemed you knows the plans the Father has for you. He will prosper you through faith and by grace to be conformed to Christ, preparing you for the eternal home our ascended Savior is preparing for all who live by faith. May you walk with Jesus this week and be pleasantly surprised at all He brings into your life as He continues to complete you in Him.  
Amen.