

## Father, Make Us One

May 24, 2009

(Easter 7 - Year B)

John 17: 6-19

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

For years and years, I have heard it said that Christians are supposed to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

This idea of Christians living in the world, but not being of the world, comes from today's reading from the Gospel of John.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is praying to his Father on the night before he dies.

Jesus prays:

“And I am no longer in the world, but my [followers] are in the world. [Yet] they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Jesus' prayer, we are to live *in* the world, but not be *of* the world.

Last Sunday, President Obama gave the commencement speech at Notre Dame University.

Before President Obama gave the speech at Notre Dame, many folks in the Roman Catholic community went into an uproar that Notre Dame would even consider inviting the President to give the speech.

The controversy erupted because, on the issue of abortion, Barack Obama is an proponent of freedom of choice.

This stance puts the President at odds with the Roman Catholic community, who believes, officially, that abortion should be outlawed in the United States.

According to an article in the Waco Trib yesterday morning, the Cardinal Newman Society, a Catholic group, collected more than

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<sup>1</sup> See John 17:11 and 17:16

367,000 signatures in a petition condemning Obama's role in the Notre Dame commencement ceremony.

At the heart of the Notre Dame commencement speech controversy is the question:

How should Christians live in the world, yet not be of the world?

Although the situation at Notre Dame seems extreme, we face the same question every day in our own lives:

How should Christians live in the world, yet not be of the world?

In our Baptismal Covenant, we promise at our Baptism that we will be faithful in weekly worship.

Yet, there are many families who are faced with the conflict of choosing between attending Sunday worship vs. have their kids play in soccer tournaments that are held on Sundays.

In our historic Christian teaching, we have taught that intimate relations are to be reserved only for monogamous marriages.

Yet, I would say that 90% of the couples who are seeking to be married in this church are already intimate, if not already living together.

In the Ten Commandments, it says that we are to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Yet, shopping malls are packed and NFL games are cheered and Bloody Marys are consumed, all on Sundays.

On the night before Jesus died, Jesus asked that we would live in the world, yet not be of the world.

Yet I have a hard time believing that Jesus wants me to forbid kids from playing soccer.

I have a hard time believing that Jesus wants me to protest performing weddings for men and women who are already living together.

I have a hard time believing that Jesus wants me to turn off the Dallas Cowboys game on Sundays.

How are we supposed to live *in* the world, but not be *of* the world?

And this question is often asked even in my own family.

Two months ago, an invitation arrived in our mailbox.

It was the invitation to Scott's basketball banquet.

At the banquet, Scott would be honored as a graduating senior on the Midway varsity basketball team.

Yet, when I looked at the date of the banquet on the invitation, I became livid.

Because the coach and the booster club had scheduled the banquet on the night of Maundy Thursday, the night when we have one of the holiest of church services, remembering the night of Jesus' Last Supper.

I contacted the coach and the parents and told them that this date was a problem for Roman Catholics and Episcopalians and Lutherans, all of whom commemorate Maundy Thursday as a night of worship.

Even though I was able to educate quite a few people about what Maundy Thursday means, the banquet was held, as originally scheduled.

And our family had to figure out how we are to live in the world, but not be of the world.

In the end, we came to an imperfect solution.

Susan and Scott attended the basketball banquet.

And John and I attended the worship service here at St. Alban's.

For centuries, many Christians have written and debated how it is that we are supposed to live in the world, but not be of the world.

One of the more famous of these works is Richard Niebuhr's groundbreaking book, *Christ and Culture*.

Yet even Niebuhr's insightful book never seems to give a perfect answer.

Which makes me think that maybe we are asking the wrong question.

Maybe we should not be asking how we are to live in the world, but not be of the world.

Maybe we should be asking instead:

How can we be one?

Because in Jesus' prayer for us that is recorded in the Gospel of John,  
Jesus not only prays about how we are to interact with the world.  
Jesus goes on to pray:  
"Holy Father, may [my followers] be one, as we are one."

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one.  
And the one God, who is in perfect relationship, desires for us to be one,  
as well.

Therefore, the burning question of the Christian life is not:  
Should President Obama speak at Notre Dame?  
Instead, the question becomes:  
How can we disagree about abortion? - yet become one.

The burning question is not:  
Should a basketball banquet be held on a holy day?  
Instead, the question becomes:  
How can we respect different worship traditions? - yet become one.

This morning, we are baptizing two girls, Daria and Sophie Moore.  
We are baptizing them into the Christian faith.  
And the longer I journey in this Christian faith, the more I believe that  
our faith does not give us the right answers.  
Instead, I believe that our Christian faith teaches us to ask the right  
questions.

Therefore, I believe that Daria and Sophie will never find the right  
answer to the question of how we are to live in this world, but not  
be of this world.  
I believe that none of us will ever learn how to perfectly walk the  
balance beam between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom  
of God.

However, I believe that the Christian faith and life leads us to ask a  
different question:  
How can we become one - one with fundamentalists and  
conservationists and literalists and naturalists and scientists and  
liturgists?

How can we become one?

And, in my life, I only know of one way to become one with my friends  
and one with my enemies.

I only know to gather around this one Table, to share in the one bread  
and to drink from the one cup.

I only know that when I walk away from this one communion of bread  
and wine,

Then I am changed -

And I am at one with my God and at one with my sisters and brothers.

Therefore, our primary prayer is not how we are to live in the world, but  
not of the world.

Instead, the primary prayer of our hearts, the prayer of Jesus, is:  
Father, make us one.

AMEN.

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