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John 15:18-16:4
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Not of the World

You might have noticed during this season of Lent that we have been focusing on Jesus' life and ministry in the Gospel of John. And in it, John describes Jesus' miracles and teachings. Now one would think that these things would have garnered him quite a following. But as we have seen more and more, it did just the opposite.

Last week we saw how tensions rose between the Jewish authorities and Jesus. So much so that they were wanting to stone him for blasphemy and breaking their sabbath laws.

Today we step away from that heat, where Jesus and his disciples had one last meal together. It was just before Passover and Jesus' crucifixion. He washed his disciples feet, shared a meal with them, and told them what was to come next. He also gave them this last set of wisdom for how to navigate the world after he was gone.

Please join me as we read from Jesus words in John 15:18-16:4 and we hear for ourselves what was on Jesus' heart.

18 [Jesus said], "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. **19** If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. **20** Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. **21** They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. **22** If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. **24** If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. **25** But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

26 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. **27** And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

16 "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. **2** They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. **3** They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. **4** I have told you this, so that when their time

comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning I want to dive into these profound words and see what they have to say to us today. We'll answer what is the world that Jesus was talking about? How are we Christians to respond in contrast to the hatred of the world? And what is God calling us to otherwise?

The Greek word that Jesus used here for world is "cosmos." I don't think he was talking about the physical world that he created in Genesis. Instead he was referring to the social, moral, ethical, religious, and political affairs of the earth. Or the way we interact with God and with one another. These form the world in which we live.

And yes, Jesus cares about the way his followers engage in politics - which is why we talk about politics occasionally in church.

Clearly Jesus felt opposition between his way and the world's way.

But what set the two apart?

Socially, the world teaches us to ignore those who are outcasts. To remain separate from them. To turn our eye away from our fellow human in need. To hoard resources and not share them. To expect others to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and make something out of their lives. The world tells us to expel the alien living among us and not welcome them. To develop relationships with people who are just like us, look like us, believe like us, act like us, live like us, and vote like us.

The world teaches us to polemicize ourselves into camps of us verses them.

But Jesus spent time with those who were different from him. The poor, the blind, the lame, the diseased. People who were thought "cursed" by God for some past sin. Jesus even told a Parable of the Good Samaritan as one who took time to care for such people at his own expense. Jesus encourages us to spend time with the sick and to care for them even at the risk of getting sick ourselves.

And may we never forget that Jesus himself was at one time an alien whose family sought political refuge in Egypt when King Herod was out to kill him. Let us keep that in mind as our country mass deports innocent people seeking asylum and refuge. For one of them could be Jesus.

Morally, the world teaches us to look down on those who have fallen into sin. To treat them with contempt, hatred, and judgment. The world's way puffs us up with pride and makes us think that we are somehow better than they are.

But Jesus dined with tax collectors and prostitutes...people whose lifestyles would have banned them from temple worship all together. John tells the story of a woman caught in the act of adultery by the town's religious folk and brought into

the public square to stone her. Jesus challenged them that whoever was without sin to cast the first stone. None of them could. None of us could! Jesus' way teaches that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" and that no-one but God has the right to judge others...period.¹

Ethically, the world preaches, dog eat dog, everyone fend for themselves and protect what is yours. The world teaches us to insult people, call them names, and make up lies that just aren't true. And when we are exposed for telling lies, we spin it around and call them political hoaxes.

The world teaches us to hoard our resources and not share with those in need.

But Jesus taught that the way we treated one another was a reflection of our relationship with God. Jesus encouraged us to love others, even those who hate us and to pray for those who persecute us. To treat others with the same respect, love, and kindness we wished to receive. To forgive as often as necessary. And to have faith that God would give us the strength to do these things when we could not do it ourselves.

Jesus taught that everything we have is a gift from God and that we should look out for the needs of others especially the widow, orphan, and alien within our border. To not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.²

Religiously, the world tells us that it is enough to know about God. That all faiths lead to God and that belief in one God is narrow minded. The world says, it's ok to believe one thing and then do another.

But Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road the leads to life, which only a few find."⁴

Jesus went head to toe with the religious authorities who taught people about God, while Jesus talked as if he knew God the Father personally. Jesus possessed authority which none of the other rabbis had. He went as far as calling them white washed tombs...looking perfectly good on the outside, but whose hearts were full of death and decay on the inside.

And politically, the world teaches us America First. We are to be proud, arrogant, and haughty. We are the best. The strongest. The brightest. And the most optimistic country in the world. In fact we are the hope for the world. Who

¹ Romans 3:23

² Matthew 6:19

³ John 14:6

⁴ Matthew 7:13-15

needs neighbors and allies? We can do it ourselves. And if you stand in our way, we'll go to war against you.

But Jesus teaches us to be meek, pure in heart, and merciful. Jesus knew the injustices that can occur when religion embeds itself within corrupt political systems. Jesus' way teaches that when we are weak, we are strong. Jesus' way says blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. That the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. To treat our neighbors and allies the same way we want to be treated. Fairly.

Jesus taught that the way to become great is to become a servant of all and to lay down our lives for our friends, allies, and neighbors. Not demean them.

And when these two worlds collide, sparks fly.

Jesus told us very clearly, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."

John used this word "hate" seven times in this short passage. It comes from the Greek word "miseo." It means to detest something so much so that we are willing to persecute or act violently toward someone or something. And people, particularly we religious folk, can be so self-righteous and clouded in judgment that we can actually think that our hatred is offering a service to God. It is NOT!

Jesus never tells us to hate other people.

Psalm 97 commands us to hate evil and the falsehood that people tell.⁵

The Apostle Paul says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge: I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals upon his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."⁶

⁵ Psalm 97:10 and Psalm 119:116

⁶ Romans 12:9-21

So what does this look like in actual practice?

“Ghassan Thomas was a pastor of one of the few Christian churches [in Baghdad] after Saddam Hussein was toppled. His congregation erected a sign on their building that said "Jesus Is the Light of the World," but the church was raided by bandits who left behind a threat on a piece of cardboard. It read: "Jesus is not the light of the world, Allah is, and you have been warned." The note was signed "The Islamic Shiite Party.”

In response, Pastor Ghassan loaded a van with children's gifts and medical supplies—which were in critically short supply—and drove to the headquarters of the Islamic Shiite Party. After presenting these gifts to the sheikh, Ghassan told the leader, "Christians have love for you, because our God is a God of love." He then asked permission to read from the Bible. Ghassan turned to Jesus' words in John 8, "I am the light of the world." He then showed him the cardboard note left behind by the mosque's people. The Muslim leaders, astounded by Pastor Thomas's actions, apologized.

"This will not happen again," [the sheikh] vowed. "You are my brother. If anyone comes to kill you, it will be my neck first."⁷

This is what Jesus means to be in the world, but not of the world.

Our citizenship is in heaven, not on earth or a particular country for that matter. As followers of Jesus, we are guided by a different law. A unique social, moral, spiritual, ethical, and political code that Jesus himself has written upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit that lives in us. Our job as Christians is to follow that as best as we can, knowing that we might clash with the world around us. That's ok. Jesus told us to expect that.

In his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus taught, “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.”⁸

The Apostle Paul reminds us, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.”⁹

What armor is that? The Belt of Truth. The seat of emotions was believed to be located in one's gut. Having God's truth secured around our waists protects us when our emotions might lead us astray.

⁷ Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity* (Zondervan, 2009), pp. 61-62. Posted on PreachingToday.com

⁸ Luke 6:22-23

⁹ Ephesians 6:12-18

The Breastplate of Righteousness guards and protects our heart with Jesus' righteousness for the heart is the wellspring of life.

The Gospel of Peace on our Feet. We have the power to choose peace. We can walk towards peace and not away from it. We can still protest, but peacefully. Jesus' people should have no part in setting Tesla or Tesla dealerships on fire!

The Shield of Faith. This is the belief that God can fight the battles for us through prayer.

The Helmet of Salvation protects our thought from conforming to the patterns of this world, but instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then we will be able test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will.¹⁰

With these tools we can stand firm in the world and not waver.

So may we know that being in the world but not of it is not an easy path in any age. It will bring conflict. Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world."¹¹ As we abide in Him, we too shall overcome. So let us embrace our identity as citizens of heaven, fulfilling our mission on earth, always remembering that come what may, our ultimate allegiance is to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Never before in our country do I recall a time that this has been more poignant for us to remember this than now.

Amen.

¹⁰ Romans 12:2

¹¹ John 16:33