

Dear Members and Friends of St. John Lutheran,

Before Jesus was crucified, He went to His father in prayer. John 17 gives us a remarkable glimpse of what life will be like, living in a world that not only doesn't understand the real Truth, but actually hates the Truth.

Jesus prays to the Father, *"Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."* (John 17:7-19 ESV).

To be a Christian is to understand the Truth. Jesus says in John 14, *"I am the way, **the truth**, and the life..."* Jesus is Truth. One of the toughest things for Christians to deal with is this understanding that **we are not going to be loved and admired by the world**. From childhood, our parents have instilled in us this understanding that good people are people that are admired and respected by others. People look up to good people – they want to be around them – they want to be like them. They admire them for their honesty and integrity. Now we have the Truth indwelling in us – and verse 14 of our text tells us that we're going to be **hated!**

This dilemma, trying to be liked in the world, while knowing that being a Christian is going to cause us to be hated, is at the very crux of whether we end up living for Christ, or living for the world around us.

In short, it creates what I'll refer to as **"closet Christians."** Closet Christians love to pretend to other Christians that living a Christian life is fantastic - things couldn't be better! They talk about the joy that they feel on Sunday morning. They share openly their thoughts about someday being in Heaven with our Lord. All of this, of course, is well and good. But then comes Monday through Saturday. For the "closet Christian", the message changes from sharing the love of Jesus by sharing the Gospel, to baseball ("What's up with those Tigers, anyway?"), or fishing, or golf, or the weather, or just about any other topic *except* Christ. The Gospel message will be attacked as a lie, something fabricated by the Church to try to trick people or mislead them (see the accompanying article

"*Reservations about the Resurrection?*"). Jesus, of course, predicted this would happen. What is our reaction to these criticisms, when we hear them in the grocery store, or at a neighbor's house, or when we're with friends? For a 'closet Christian' the response will be **a deafening silence**. "No sense in making someone dislike me over Church, after all."

Of course, the 'closet Christian' rationalizes his silence by saying to himself, "I'm not a pastor. There's no way that I know enough about the Bible to defend it." But that, of course, is another lie. To state in public that "Jesus died on the cross for my sins and your sins, too, so that we could be freed from the penalty of not keeping God's law", is not a difficult message to proclaim. It's really just a Good Friday – Easter message: "Jesus took on my sins and died for me. But He didn't remain in the grave. He rose again on Easter morning, so that I too might live forever with Him!" We've all known this message since Sunday school (or at least most of us who were brought up in the church). And yet there's silence.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus would know just how sinful we would be, and yet still freely die for us. You see, it's all too easy to go silent when we know we should speak. We all suffer from the effects of wanting to be **liked by the world**, more than being a **light to people that are headed for hell**. That's where God's Word is able to help: Turns out that the Truth that we have in us is greater than our sinful nature. But the Truth needs to be nurtured. We need to be in worship regularly so that we can confess our sin (like remaining silent while others attack the message of Jesus Christ). We can draw strength from our Lord, so that we can be a bold witness to the lost around us. Bible study and worship provide us with that strength. Jesus said in the last verse of our text, "*And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*" Jesus would die for your sake. He did it so that your life could be a living witness to the Truth. He departed this world, so that the **Spirit could come and give us joy, even when we face hatred for our confession of faith** (v. 13). May our Living Lord give us the strength that we need to live lives centered on living for Him.

Pastor Travis