

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Seventh Sunday of Easter [Exaudi] (2021)

Believers are at Conflict with the World

Rev. Toby Byrd

“And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” (John 15:27–16:2, ESV)

It is our Lord’s last evening with His apostles. He knows His hour has come and on the morrow He will give His life upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of men’s sins. By His death He will open God’s heart for full reconciliation with sinful man. Thus of keen importance to Him on this farewell evening is just how His ministry will be carried on by His apostles. His interest focuses on preserving their zeal for proclaiming the Gospel and ensuring that their proclamation will be what He has taught. He has chosen these men to be His witnesses, witnessing of His miracles, His teachings, His Messiahship, and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Our Lord knows that what they proclaim will be challenged, placing their lives in danger. So His words, especially on this evening are meant to bolster His apostle’s zeal, to keep them steadfast in the face of worldly opposition to His word, to the proclamation of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in His name. Therefore, of great interest to Him is how they will go about getting the word out and how they will keep the word straight as the sainted Al Barry was so fond of saying. Thus, to help them to carry out their task of proclaiming the Gospel and building His Church, He promises to give them divine assistance, to send them a Helper. He tells them, ***“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26, ESV)*** Thus, regardless of the worldly opposition and dangers they will face, the apostles will always have the Helper, the Holy Spirit to remind them of what our Lord Jesus taught and at the same time emboldening them to proclaim that Gospel truth to a world which will hate them. In this same way He sends us the Holy Spirit to face that same worldly opposition, an opposition which never ceases to rail and fight against our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is an opposition spurred on by Satan and carried out by the flesh. An opposition which always places *Believers at Conflict with the World*.

Therefore, we pray; Almighty God, send Your Spirit into our hearts that we may be Spirit-filled followers of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us a strong and steadfast faith with which to bear the world’s hatred with patient courage and with an unstoppable zeal for proclaiming the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name, which is above all names, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Girded by Your Word, lead us to stand strong in the face of worldly mockery and scorn that we may give a blessed and bold testimony of the glorious truth of the Gospel for the salvation of all men. We pray for these and all things in the name of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this same evening that our Lord promised the sending of the Holy Spirit, He also gave the apostles a command. He said, ***“Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19, ESV)*** He said these words when He instituted the Holy Supper. After His departure, our Lord knew that the busyness of life, its turmoil, and tribulations, would challenge His apostle’s memory of Him. Life is challenging, we are reminded of this every day, and so the challenges of life can cause the

memory to grow dim. To meet this challenge, our Lord gave the Church something that would keep His memory fresh and vivid in the hearts and minds of His followers. He gave them the Sacrament of His body and blood and urged them to gather frequently around His table of grace and receive His blessed gifts of His holy body and blood under consecrated bread and wine. In so doing they would not forget Him but in faith and tender love always remember Him and His redemptive work upon the Altar of the Cross.

“Remember Me,” such precious words, words with which we gather around this morning when we receive Him in the holy Eucharist. Words which are part of His tender farewell, which are meant to cheer us and strengthen us as we face the challenges of a bitter and unfriendly world.

Our Lord is not just the world’s Redeemer, He is Lord over all the world, He is its rightful King. But through the power of sin, Satan has gained much control in this world so that he is called, *“the ruler of this world.”* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, *ESV*) and *“the prince of the power of the air.”* (Ephesians 2:2, *ESV*) He stands in opposition to our Lord Jesus and thus, there can no peace or armistice between the Author of Life and the prince of darkness. So the world will always remain a battleground between Satan, who will fight to keep his subject’s captive to the bondage of sin and unbelief, and the Prince of salvation, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will battle with the Sword of the Spirit to free men from Satan’s dominion, with the blessings of the Gospel.

Since there is war between our Lord Jesus and Satan, there must, by necessity, be a war between the subjects of the kingdom of darkness and the subjects of the Kingdom of Light. Thus, the relations of these two kingdoms, the Church and the world, Christians and unbelievers, falsehood and truth, light, and darkness, are always at odds. There can be no peace, only war. So for the Christian there are no happy care-free days, only days of bitterness, hatred, persecution, and death. This is why our Lord Jesus told His disciples to *“Remember,”* Him, for by our remembrance we are strengthened for war against Satan.

We do not have to look hard to see the beginning of this battle. The apostles and all the disciples of Jesus would be excommunicated from the Jewish Church and regarded as enemies, destroyers of the faith of their fathers. But this was not enough. After exile came bigotry, fanaticism, and hatred which would reach such a frantic pitch that men would regard the shedding of Christian blood as a well pleasing sacrifice to God. Murdering Christians would be considered a form of worship!

All this happened during the days of the apostles, but it didn’t stop there. We see it carried forward to the days of the Reformation and the counter-Reformation, in communist countries today, and in Muslim nations and communities. But even worse, we see it carried on in our own nation, one that was founded on religious freedom in the name of the Triune God. Today in the halls of congress we see the passage of bills which challenge the Church and God’s Word. One such bill is the Equality Act of 2021. If this bill is signed into law, it will have significant and wide-ranging impact on Christian churches, schools, institution, pastors, and laity. This bill includes, among other things: Forbidding federal dollars from assisting students at schools which maintain biblically based standards of conduct regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, eliminates sex-specific facilities and female only spaces, nullifies the Religious Freedom Act of 1993, eliminates conscious protections for medical personnel who choose not to perform abortions because of religious objections, threatens the Hyde Amendment limiting public funds for abortion, and threatens Christian hospitals with loss of funds for not performing abortions or genital mutilation. Satan knows that unbelievers in powerful places are some of his best weapons against the Lord and His Church.

But he is not satisfied only with corrupting congress. One of his best weapons is our public education system through which he emboldens the teaching of evolution. Teaching this theory as settled science, our public schools teach there is no God. Claiming no God, led to claiming no sin, which led to the teaching of sex-education, which today has morphed into full blown pornography, transgenderism, and all other manner of sexual sins against God. This teaching directly challenges the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit Adultery." Complaints by parents against this type of teaching falls mostly on deaf ears, but for those who do hear, their response is to call Christian parents Jesus freaks, fundamentalist, and worse. Through these tactics, Satan has established what he desired, an adversarial relationship between parents and children, a relationship encouraged and supported by public education.

Clearly, as long as the Church is loyal to Christ, to the Gospel-truth of the vicarious atonement of God's only begotten Son for the forgiveness of sin, and as long as true believers lead Christ-consecrated lives separated in spirit and works from the world, the Church and the disciples of Jesus will always be at odds with the world, experiencing their hatred, mockery, and scorn. Experiencing their desire to steal our children away from Christ. Freedom from the worlds abuse comes at the price of disloyalty to Christ and the indwelling Spirit. Freedom from the world's abuse comes at the price of apostacy. Do you know someone who is willing to give up Christ to be at peace with the world? If so, please pray that the Holy Spirit would turn them back to Christ.

The good news is, we can rest assured that Christ never tells of suffering without offering words of comfort and encouragement. At the beginning of His ministry, our Lord Jesus purposely had not told His disciples the details of living the way of the cross. Now, however, the sad prospect of such a life could no longer be withheld. He was leaving very soon. So when those dark days of antagonism, persecution, mockery, and scorn, which Jesus knew would come, came, they would remember that these sad and perilous days were a fulfillment of His prophecy and therefore proof of the truth of His Word, of all His teaching. The enmity of the world would find them forewarned and therefore also forearmed. The unfriendly reception, the social and religious ostracism, the cutting and stinging scorn, the damp dungeons, the drawn sword, and rugged crosses, these would not surprise them, these were not unexpected happenings. Being assured that these prophecies would be fulfilled, they took great comfort in these words of their Master, ***"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Matthew 5:12, ESV) And again, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*** (John 14:2-3, ESV)

These words comfort us this day as we live and worship in, ***"Remembrance"*** of Him. This morning you will come forward to the altar rail and you will commune with Christ. In receiving His body and blood under the bread and wine of holy Communion, He will come to you and you shall be where He is as He is in you. He is in you cleansing you of sin, fortifying you against the onslaught, mockery, scorn, and hatred of the world. Strengthening your faith that you may stand tall as a child of God, as a brother or sister in Christ proclaiming to an angry world, your anger against me is in vain for I will never surrender my faith to a faithless world.

But even more, He strengthens your faith so that you can say to this angry world, you are railing and fighting against what you cannot conquer, rather than victory your faithless efforts lead only to defeat and an eternal prison in hell? Is this what you desire, eternal life with your worldly prince, the devil? If not, then let me show you the Author of Life, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let me show you how through His life, His suffering, His death upon the Altar of the Cross, and His resurrection from the dead, you, too, can be resurrected to eternal life. Let me show you how His death paid the penalty for your sin, ransomed you from the wrath of God, and

promises you an eternity of bliss, an eternity where there is no turmoil, nor tribulations, no mockery, no scorn, nor any death. Let me show you how our Lord Jesus has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil and how He desires to make His victory yours. Are you interested? Come with me to His house of prayer and listen to Him speak to you through the voice of our pastor. Come with me to His house of mercy where you can receive the same blessings I have received through His blessed sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution. Oh, please listen to me and receive what our Lord Jesus so desire to give you, His forgiveness.

Yes, *Believers are at Conflict with the World*, but our sincerest desire is that the world would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth before our Lord Jesus brings this conflict to an end with His return on the Last Day. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.