

**Weekend of Sunday, May 13, 2018**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**Primary Text: John 17:6-19**  
**Sermon Title: “In the World, But Not Of the World”**

**Theme**

*In this reading the church hears Jesus’ words on the night before his death. This gospel reports the words of Jesus’ prayer, a prayer for his disciples and for all who would believe in him through their words.*

**Text**

[Jesus prayed:] <sup>6</sup>“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

## Sermon

Have you ever hear the old Negro Spiritual, “Follow the Drinking Gourd”? I never have either but I learned about it this week. Here is the story.

The Underground Railroad meant freedom for many in the years before Emancipation, and it had a map. That map is a song called “Follow the Drinking Gourd.”

“Follow the Drinking Gourd” was supposedly used by “engineers” in the Underground Railroad to direct slaves to freedom. There are questions about its authenticity, but if accurate, “Drinking Gourd” describes a trail from Mobile, Alabama to Paducah, Kentucky. From Paducah, slaves could cross the Ohio River to the free states.

The unnamed hero of “Follow the Drinking Gourd” is an “old man,” sometimes known as Peg Leg Joe, who would “carry you to freedom.” The drinking gourd is a euphemism for the Big Dipper. Facing the Big Dipper, the viewer would see the North Star. The song is telling the listener to head north to freedom. Pretty vague, but it gets far more detailed as the verses go on.

The verses are written in code and one would have to know the code to follow it, but those details were passed on among the slave community and it details safe passage through the South to freedom.

### Play the video

As was the case with many Negro Spirituals, “Follow the Drinking Gourd” became very popular during the American Civil Rights Movement. The song was reworked by Lee Hays. He altered the melody and took out some of the local dialect. This made the song more appealing to a larger (whiter) audience.

“Follow the Drinking Gourd” was covered by many different artists during the Civil Rights Movement. Some of them include:

The Weavers  
Pete Seeger  
The Village Stompers

The Brothers Four  
The New Christy Minstrels  
Peter, Paul and Mary

Regardless of whether “Follow the Drinking Gourd” is fact or fiction, it is still a piece of American history. Not only does it make the Underground Railroad come to life, but it helped show the tribulations of blacks before the Civil Rights Movement.

I think that song works well as an illustration of the Gospel Reading. More on that in a moment

The gospel reading is taken from what we call Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” and the setting is the Last Supper. Jesus and his disciples had made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But along the slow meandering journey Jesus warned the disciples of his Passion. And he was even pretty specific about it, but generally, things were going pretty well, so the disciples just disregarded it.

But on that night, his tenor had changed. He was much more subdued and began to explain things in much greater detail. He washed their feet – that should have never happened they thought. He presided over the traditional Passover Seder, but on this night he took a couple of the traditional elements of the meal, the bread and the wine, and he said crazy things like “this is me, given for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” None of it made any sense to them but they just let him go on, after all, he was their Lord, their Rabbi, their teacher.

But then he began to give them *final instructions!* “Where was he going? Why do we need *final instructions?*” they must have thought.

And then he prayed. Obviously he prayed out loud; later a couple of the disciples wrote down what he said as they remembered it. And I think that in itself is powerful.

Though it is not a feature of this sermon, I cannot help repeating myself in saying that, of all the things we might have thought Jesus would have been thinking about at that moment, knowing what he was about to go through, what he was really

thinking about was his disciples, those with him in the room that night, and all of us who have followed them in faith. Amazing, isn't it?

As I already said, he prayed out loud so that they would know unambiguously, what he prayed for. The prayer is powerful and packed with many preach-able expressions, but I picked just one. And that expression is the title of this sermon, ***“In the World, But Not Of the World.”***

Let me ask you this, is it clear to you what Jesus means by being “in the world, but not of the world?” That song I started with, “Follow the Drinking Gourd” might help illustrate what I am talking about.

The slave on the run needed direction, otherwise he or she could be running the wrong way and deeper south, or into hostile territory not friendly to their plight. So the song reminds them to follow the drinking gourd, the North Star of the Big Dipper. So they are both in the world, but getting guidance from above.

The disciples of Jesus Christ that witnessed his prayer with their own ears would indeed shortly be on the run too, on the run from those who will be attempting to eradicate the very memory of Jesus in the hours ahead. He knew that, and that is why he prayed for their safety, and for their guidance, and for the Holy Spirit who will guide them, and remind them that this earthly realm will attempt to pull them back in. They will need to be reminded that they are in the world, but not of the world – they are of God, revealed in himself, Jesus Christ.

It is the same for us modern day disciples. This earthly realm is constantly trying to suck us in. We are bombarded with all kinds of media telling us we need this to be *all that*, and that if we had this then we will finally be young and fit and popular and respected and wise and so on.

But to all that, Jesus prayed, and I paraphrase, “Father in heaven, remind these I love that their citizenship is not found on earth, for all this will come and go. Rather, remind them that their true citizenship is in your heavenly kingdom. Send them our Spirit so that when I am no longer walking with them they will be reminded to follow where it leads.” Or as the song goes, “Follow the Drinking Gourd.”

Yes, friends, our citizenship is *not of this* world though we are *in it* for a time. I know and understand how strong the pull of the world is. I myself am blessed. I have everything I need and many things I want. But all of that will come and go and I will likely be drawn to whatever is newer and shinier. There is nothing I can do about that. Temptation is not the sin. Giving in to it, well, there is the problem. What to do? I am so glad you asked. It is my Raisin the Bar Challenge

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Just as those slaves on the run had to keep their eyes on the North Star and follow drinking gourd, we too have to keep the eyes of our faith on Jesus who redeemed us, and follow where his Holy Spirit leads us. And while that sounds pretty easy, most of you know it is not. And to complicate that admonition, there is no physical manifestation of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to focus on like a North Star.

But we are not left alone to wander aimlessly. Our Lord Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, a guiding star if you will, that if we are attentive to it, will guide us to our heavenly home where our citizenship is eternal. Follow it, and you will arrive.

### **Prayer**

Father in heaven, on the night of his Passion, your son and our Lord Jesus prayed for ... us! The realization of that is still breathtaking. Remind us daily of the price he was willing to pay to give us access to your eternal heavenly kingdom. And make your Holy Spirit more obvious in our lives day by day that we may follow it until the day we see you face to face. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen