

The title for today's message is: **In It, Not of It**

Jesus said: ***As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every now and then, you hear about someone who makes a lasting tribute to a loved one. Jack Benny comes to mind.

He made arrangements that upon his death, flowers would be sent to his wife every day for the rest of her life.

I know! Makes the rest of us look bad, Sometimes however, memorial messages aren't so intentional.

I love the story of the man who sent his wife a text message after checking into his Florida hotel on a business trip.

She was going to meet him there the next day, but he died shortly after checking in.

As it happens with text messages, every now and then one will get lost in the system and show up days, or even months later.

His showed up the day after his funeral. It was short and to the point: "Honey, it's been a long journey, and I am finally all checked in here.

I am so excited that you will be joining me soon; I can't wait to see you. P.S. – It's really hot here."

Probably not the message he would have sent if he had known he would die soon.

In John chapter 17, we find a message from Jesus in a powerful prayer He prayed to His Father in heaven.

First off Jesus prays for Himself, then for His disciples, and then continues on to pray for all those whom the Gospel will reach.

And unlike the text message from Florida, Jesus knows His circumstances in advance. He knows what's coming very soon.

In fact, John tells us that immediately after this prayer Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley with His disciples, and on to the olive grove where he is arrested.

So we can't miss the impact of this prayer. Not only is it Jesus prayer for you and me, its His prayer that His disciples and all who will carry on His mission of Salvation after He ascends into heaven.

This is our prayer too for our time today: That we would be encouraged in our faith that the midst of a harsh and hostile world.

We too would carry out Christ's mission of salvation as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

I don't like to use those two words, harsh and hostile, but there isn't really any other way to make it softer.

Jesus Himself uses plain language in telling us what life on this spinning globe is like for all believers in Him.

Jesus said: ***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.***

Jesus was about to experience the full hatred of the world in less than 48 hours as He dies on the cross for all our sins.

Yet even today, it seems there is still plenty of hatred to go around. You read about it all the time, you see it on TV; and you listen to it on the radio.

Much of the world is full of hatred. And much of this hatred is directed at God and those who believe in Him. It's fun to try and humiliate Christians.

I know people who are afraid to share their faith at work, all because they're afraid they'll be treated differently.

There are atheist groups who take out ads attacking faith. They have even started calling themselves the "Bright's," as to imply that those of us who believe in God are the "Not-so-bright."

It's pretty clear that the life of a Christian isn't supposed to be easy in this sinful world.

Jesus knew hatred, His disciples knew hatred, and frankly all those who believe in Jesus will come to know it as well.

Look, In our country we actually have it pretty easy in this regard, but it's there all the same. So what's the answer?

Many believe the only answer is to find a way out of the struggles of living out their faith.

When Jesus says that the world will hate Christians, my first thought is, "OK then, get us out of here!"

I mean wouldn't that be great? If we could just go and sit out on the curb instead of being in the midst of the fight!

But according to Christ Jesus, that isn't the game plan for us at all. In fact, it's just the opposite:

Sitting on the sidelines isn't what Christ prayed for, concerning His disciples, or you and me for that matter:

Look, the truth is, God won't have us sit this one out. He makes no promise that things will go easy for us.

But He does promise to protect us from the evil one. So we are forgiven, given hope in the resurrection, and we are wrapped up in God's love in the Holy Spirit.

And we are called to get up off the curb! Which leads to the next question, how are we to respond to all this hatred around us?

Some say the answer is to fight back, and to fight hard! But our weapon isn't more hatred, No! our weapon is love.

That's right, love. Jesus is pretty explicit in telling us the harsh truth that the world hates Him.

The world wants nothing to do with God, or the idea that there is a truth out there, that there is a judge out there,

Nor, that there is a God who demands accountability. So we see it time and time again, it's nothing new, there is rebellion, and insult, and rejection of the Creator of the Universe.

And how does God answer all this? We read about it in that famous verse John 3:16 – ***“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son.”***

To a world dead set against Him, God sent His own Son to die for it. To a world that forsakes Him, Christ dies to win forgiveness of it's sins.

To a world that rejects Him, God never stops calling, "**come unto me and I will give you life.**" Yes, God responds to hatred, with love.

Now before we begin saying that there is so many people who really don't deserve our love, we should begin with the person we see in the mirror.

For as obvious as it is that the world out there needs to change, it is every bit as clear that each of us need to change as well.

We don't have to look past our own hearts to find rebellion against God, and we don't have to look beyond our own lips to hear hateful words.

Sure it's much easier when all this is someone else's problem. But it isn't just someone else's problem. It's your problem, and my problem.

Jesus says in His prayer: ***They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.***

But too often I find in my own life, I act like I am of the world. There are times when if I were to be convicted of being a Christian.

It would be hard to find the evidence needed to make the conviction stick. I am sure you can think of countless examples of the same in your life.

So how is it that God expects us to go out into the world and make a difference? The answer is the same as when Jesus first spoke this prayer.

God does not send us out alone, or under only our own power. Jesus prays these words which we need to have seared in our minds.

Jesus said: ***Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.***

What is Jesus asking when He asks that we would be sanctified? It means that we would be set apart by God for a purpose.

That God would make us holy for a holy mission. And we are. God makes us Holy through the Holy Spirit's activity in our life in Word and Sacrament.

The Holy Spirit points us to the truth, that Christ died for our sins, that He rose from the dead, and that He is always present and active in our lives.

Look, being ready to share the love of Christ isn't about us, or what we can do. No! It's all about God, and what He can do through us!

Christ changes us, and who we are, and how our story will end. And He then uses us, sanctifies us, to be His agent of change to the world.

Our mission is to continue on in the work that Jesus started. I know it sounds like a huge task, and it is. It sounds like too much for us, and it is.

But it's not too big for God. It's not too big for the cross. It's not too big for the empty tomb, and it's not too big for those who have been redeemed in Christ's blood.

Often times, this fighting hatred with love takes some very simple forms. We fight with love in the little gestures of concern we share with our friends and co-workers.

We fight this battle in love when we listen to those who are hurting, when we share our faith, when we serve others.

We are God's and he will use us and continues to use us. Remember, it's God who loves us even at our worst.

And it is this grace of God that strengthens us to do the best of things at the worst of times.

Because of the cross we are not of the world, but while we are in it, we have a job to do.

To be the picture of the love of God that shines above the hatred of the world.

It's what Jesus meant when he said: ***As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.***

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.