

“Where Do I Belong?”
Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13;
John 17:6-19

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I wonder if I asked for a show of hands how many of you would say that the Gospel passage I just read sounded confusing. All this going back and forth – God, you gave me your word, I gave them your word sort of language. Jesus talking about being in the middle.

I was reading a book recently that talked about Jesus as the one that is translating God into human life, and I thought that maybe that’s what this is about. Jesus is talking about the fact that he’s translating God into human life. Maybe not all of God. It seems mostly he’s translating God’s will, God’s way, and God’s work into human life, inviting us to be in relationship with God and to be reminded of the wonder of who God is.

It’s that idea I think 1 John picks up on when he’s talking about Jesus’ testimony. He’s bringing a way of engaging us with God. That idea of translating is a way of putting it into our own language, putting it into our own experience. Translating so often is just about words, but it feels to me like Jesus is translating more than words. He is inviting us to engage in an experience that translates God to us in a way that words can’t do.

In 1 John 5:10, he’s talking about the testimony in their hearts. I think one of the ways we experience that testimony in our hearts is experiencing the love of God, the grace given us. In giving us Jesus, God shows how he values each of us. God engages us in our lives, and we have that experience in our hearts. So, we have both the testimony of Jesus’ life and teaching, death and resurrection, and then we also have the testimony that encounters us in our hearts, engaging us with Jesus.

As Jesus is translating God into our lives, he identifies something that is a divergent from what he is providing. He says in John 17:14, “I have given them your word and the world hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” As we receive the message, the testimony, the translation that Jesus is giving, we may begin to find we don’t belong to the world. Now, what does that mean?

The word there is the Greek word, *cosmos*, which we translate into cosmos (universe). That is often the way we think about the idea of the world, that it is everything. However, in John, he’s not using it to mean the way we might generally think about “world.” He tends to be using it in a different way.

There’s another word that we use that also comes from the Greek word *cosmos*, and it is cosmetic. Because *cosmos* also could mean the way things are painted, the adornment, the way things are ordered. As we think about that idea of “cosmetic” coming out of *cosmos*, I was thinking about a makeup artist as they work with

somebody in the theater or in the movies. They can change a person's appearance with a bunch of cosmetics. It is that idea that I think John is getting at.

It reminds me of something Shakespeare said, and I'll paraphrase it, "All the world's a stage and we are but players within it." As I think about that idea that the world is a stage, I wonder how often we are the ones creating the drama. I'm going to suggest that the metaphor of the stage describes the way we live together and get along together. Often, when we go out of our own homes, we put on another way of looking, of being, of describing ourselves, what we wear, how we present ourselves. We go into the world, which is a stage, and we are players on it. Or we could think about it as human society and human culture and the way we create that to be the stage on which we play our parts.

I think it is pretty obvious that we have different cultures and societies, and they are created by human beings as they live together. It seems that we tend to embed in those societies and cultures things that are counter to the way of God. So when Jesus says the world is going to hate you because you belong to God and not to the world, I think we begin to see how that might work. We live in a world that often expects one way of living socially sanctioned lives, and God, who has a different way of life for us. We live in a world that suggests that the way we should be is a success by being better than everyone else. Well, God's way seems different. Jesus, in fact, says it's not about being better than everyone else, it's about being the servant of everyone else. We might see that there are areas of conflict that might occur between those ways of life.

We begin to recognize that Jesus suggests we may have some differences with the world if we begin to really pay attention to the witness he brings to us, both in his teachings and in his life, and in the encounter we have with God in our hearts – the love we know and the grace we've received. But he goes on to suggest there's a reason for this. It's because the world isn't necessarily about giving us life. Oftentimes it feels like the world is about giving somebody else life. It's setting things up so that a few succeed.

As Jesus is inviting us to engage with him directly, it says in 1 John 5:12, "Whoever has the Son has life." That's kind of a strange phrasing, but that sense of "has" is the sense of "belongs, engages, holds, possesses." It's a sense of having a relationship. Knowing Jesus is having a way of life that has become part of who they are.

Then the next sentence says, "...you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." There are a couple of things there. One is sometimes we take that idea that we know the name of Jesus, the Son of God, and think that as long as we know that word, Jesus, that's all we need. But really, if a law enforcement person comes and knocks on your door and says, "I'm here in the name of the law," they don't mean that there is a particular name they are bringing. Rather, and in this case as well, "name" indicates the purpose, traits, characteristics, reputation, and authority of those coming. "In the name of Jesus" refers to the purpose, the characteristics, the reputation (the glory), and the authority of Jesus. So, if we believe

in the purpose, the characteristics, the reputation, the authority of Jesus, isn't that what Jesus is doing, bringing that very nature of God into our lives? Bringing the characteristics, reputation, authority of God, the teachings of God, the will, way, and work of God into our lives?

It goes on to suggest that then we will have eternal life. And sometimes we simply translate that into something that lasts forever. Eternal life does have that quality of being timeless, but that's not the only quality it has. In fact, eternal life is the idea of having a quality rather than having a linear march of time. It may be the timelessness of love present in our lives. It is about the quality of the life of faith that we have as we live through our lives and into eternity.

So it is an invitation to recognize that as we engage with Jesus – the purpose, traits, characteristics, reputation, authority – of who he is as he brings God into our lives, that the quality and character of our lives change. Not necessarily to be more successful in the world or to be more as our world tells us to be, but to be more engaged in the grace of God, to be more a part of the family of God, to recognize that we are children of God.

I think here he's talking about it another way, a word we don't use a lot. He says, "I am sanctified, and you will be sanctified." That idea of sanctification is to say that we're separated out. It's the same way of saying being of the world may not always be the right description for a follower of Jesus. We have to be separated out, because there is much profane in our world. There is much that is not of God. There are many voices, many ways that obscure the goodness that God calls us to and the grace God gives us. So, sanctification is that idea of being separated out. It goes on to say, "in sanctification to live in truth." I would describe truth as a Christ-revealed, lived reality, the way God really made things to be.

It's always a little hard to talk about something like this, to say that God made a way for us to be that doesn't fit with the world around us. A way that has central to it the idea of grace. That has central to it the idea of love. Yet, in letting what is central to God be central to us, Jesus' joy will be made complete in us. There is a joy in that life with God and engaging with Jesus.

I feel like the world looks at us – looks at those of us who hold fast to that way of Jesus, recognizing that we are not of the world – as if we're just utopian weirdos. It can't really happen. And yet, I believe it is the most real thing that we have. It's the most real way of being. It is what Jesus is about as he translates God into our lives. As we engage with Jesus, his life, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, his sending us into the world, and our receiving that grace and love in our hearts, we are receiving what is most real and true. We begin a process of knowing where we belong and what life truly is about. Not in the world, but in Christ. Engaging in the name of Christ – the purposes, characteristics, reputation, and authority of Jesus, the Christ – that we might live, have eternal life, sanctified life, living a Christ-revealed lived reality and belonging to God.

There is so much going on in our world, and sometimes we spend so much time and attention on that. As Jesus is about to return to God at the end of the Easter season, this passage is a reminder of what is central to us if we want to live into this life God has given us in a way that is truly alive, in a way that enables what God really meant for us. It reminds us where God calls us. God's will, work, and way is another way of describing it.

Sometimes it's good to take a moment and think about who Jesus is, how he translates God into our lives and how central that translation is. Jesus is central to enabling us to truly live, to opening our hearts and our minds to the life God invites us into, engages us in, and wants us to know the joy of. Even in the midst of this crazy world, even in the midst of those times where we feel like we're just on a stage, there is one who is underneath, who does reach out to us, who sees us as more than bit players in some human created drama, who sees us as those who are worthy of love, who are gifted with grace, and who are invited to show it. Amen.