

Sermon Theme: Set Apart By Jesus For Jesus

Sermon Text: John 17:11b-19

Most people know that one bad apple spoils the whole bunch. Mom maybe warned you with that line when you were young and choosing your friends and reminded you of this a few more times when you were growing up and in high school. More than one mom has insisted that it's not exactly their child that is bad, it's their friends. It's almost impressive how all too often instead of feeding off of each other's good habits and traits, our bad habits become worse. You've probably seen enough evidence of this to agree that, more often than not, indeed one bad apple ruins the whole bunch. So the logic should go that if you remove that problem or remove yourself from the problematic situation, it should be better for you. But where do you start? Do you start with your friends? Wouldn't hurt. A family member? Perhaps. Be more aware of what leads to a certain action so that you can avoid it? Most certainly. But obviously you can't avoid sinful people and sinful situations completely. You know sin is all over the place.

But then why is it that we may be a little surprised at a sin that someone else has committed? You heard about someone's sinful action and you said, "I can't believe that happened." Or, you question, "How could they do something like that?" Maybe it's shocking because too often it seems like we downgrade or almost forgot how completely corrupting sin is. Sin is worse than a moldy, wormy apple; sin leaves people completely corrupted from the start. There are no salvageable bits. No, God's Word tells us that from nature we were dead—something dead can't do anything and is worthless. God's Word tells us that all those righteous acts—actions that on the outside look to be good, morally praised and pleasing acts of kindness—they are like filthy rags—completely useless and disgusting in God's sight. So totally does sin infect that creation itself is bound to the decay of sin. We live in a world corrupted by sin, filled with sin, filled with sinners—there are so many bad apples around. You know this. More than one parent has wondered, "What type of a world have I brought this child into?" How many parents or grandparents, how many teachers, have stated or thought that they feared for the future of their children when looking at the world today.

Now, this isn't the time for one to get on their high horse about how much better it used to be. Really not much has changed in the last century; it's just wearing a different face and maybe a little more in the open. The threat of nuclear war during the Cold War is just coming from a different place today. The economic recessions of the mid 70s, early 80, 90s, and 2000s look eerily familiar. The racial divide that we see in the news looks awfully similar to the riots in LA and to the protests of yesteryear. America being a less Christian nation today is just less people being willing to speak a lie. King Solomon was a pretty smart and wise man to say, "There's nothing new under the sun." Is it getting

worse? Of course it is. Should it surprise us? No, not at all; Jesus said it would happen. So what are we supposed to do? Again, one bad apple spoils the whole bunch. How much worse it is when the whole bunch already is bad and rotten. It would seem to make better sense to remove yourself from the situation entirely.

But that's exactly what Jesus doesn't want to happen. In John 17 Jesus knows that in a short amount of time he is going to be betrayed by one of his own and the next day is going to be Good Friday when he dies on the cross. No one would have blamed him if the only thing on his mind was preparing himself for his soon-to-come death.

But it's not. Instead, he prays. He prays for himself and then he prays for his people. Jesus' prayer isn't that his people be taken from this world. Instead, Jesus prays for their protection and they be kept safe. He prays that his people be and remain one and united with the Father, that nothing would come between them or be able to pull them from the Father. Jesus recognizes that while he was on this earth he was the one who protected the disciples, who brought them to the Father and revealed the Father to them; he kept them safe in the name of the Father. But Jesus' time is running out. And so Jesus works in his office as our High Priest. He goes between us and God, speaks to the Father on our behalf, and speaks for us so that our needs are heard. He knows that the world hates his people because they have Jesus' Word. That's the natural reaction of sinful humans—God's Word is offensive to them and sinners hate it. You may not always feel that hate and that hate might not always be directed at you, but it's there. You've felt it before—the shock from others that you believe what is written in God's Word, the disbelief that you base your faith and life on it, the jokes about it and the not being taken seriously for it. You know how it wears you down.

Then there's the evil one, the devil. That evil schemer prowls like a lion waiting for the opportune moment to pounce. He works so hard to lead God's people astray with his lies and empty promises. And when we fall into sin and listen to those lies, he is quick to pounce to accuse us and lead us to doubt God could ever love us. You know how convincing the evil one is.

Jesus prays for his people because he knows what we are up against and he knows that we need protection. Why? Because, like Jesus, we are not of the world. We are sanctified which means we are set apart from this world. And so, because we aren't part of the group, we are treated differently. We are attacked and wore down by this world and the evil one trying to pull us away from God.

Jesus knows he needs to pray for us—his people—because he knows how we struggle. We know that we are to love God above all things, including ourselves. We know that we should be finding our joy, peace, and happiness in life first and foremost in following God's will and what he tells us in his Word. But Jesus knows how even when

we know better, we find ourselves following the world and how they act. Why? It's not only because of the sinful world corrupting us. It's not only because the devil is so convincing. The problem is me. No one wants to feel alone or different or outside the group. What are you supposed to do when everyone else in society says how you are acting, how you are feeling is completely legitimate and encourages you to continue doing it but God's Word says differently? It appeals to me because—whether we want to admit it or not—following the ways of the world makes me feel good. Like the sinful world around us all too often we base our decisions and how we live on how it's going to make us feel or how others are going to feel about it. Instead of first asking what would bring God joy, what's his will, it becomes an afterthought. And at that point we may twist God's Word to try and make it prick your conscience less, try and validate your sinful actions, or just ignore it completely.

Jesus knows how when we build our lives, when our happiness, joy, and peace is based primarily on how we feel, it works for some time. And as long as life is going well, we feel like we can do everything and anything. But then life gets hard and those feelings of joy and peace you worked so hard to obtain aren't anywhere to be found. Then life starts to feel like that *Jenga* tower that had the wrong block pulled out and everything comes crashing down. When life isn't the going the way want or had planned or thought it should be going how lonely it all feels; it leaves us feeling empty, confused, and defeated. How quickly we can turn around, blame God, and maybe even wander from him, his Word, and his promises. Jesus knows the reality—no matter what we might try and convince ourselves—we are too weak on our own and do not have the strength to resist the temptations coming from this sinful world, the evil one, and ourselves.

So Jesus prays. Jesus knows the temptations you are feeling. He was tempted the same way. He knows how this world is. He lived in it. But he wouldn't fall into sin. How great a temptation it must have been, how difficult it would be to wrestle with sin knowing that he could not, at any cost, fall. And, yet, we are told in Hebrews 12:2 "*For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right of the throne of God.*" For the joy of seeing lost and condemned sinners like you and me be brought to saving faith, Jesus fought against and overcame all the temptations this world and the devil could throw at him. For the joy of giving everlasting life to people like you and me who were dead in sin, Jesus came to sanctify himself—that is, be set apart for this work. For the joy of following his Father's will he went to the cross, endured the suffering and punishment for all sin of every person. He scorned the shame of that cross because on it forgiveness of sins was won for you and me. And now he sits at the right hand of God and rules all things for God's people. Had he not been raised from the dead, we would still be lost in our sin. Had he not been welcomed back to the Father's throne, we would have no hope of life with him in heaven.

But he did and he is at God's right hand and it's there that Jesus continues to work for you. He does not ask that you be taken from this world. He doesn't pray that your life is easy or that you are always happy (understand he doesn't find sick pleasure in your suffering and pain either). Instead, he prays for what you really need. He prays the Father protect you and keep you in his name. He insists that you do not perish and be lost to the devil. He continues to remind the Father that he paid for your sins. He insists that he not punish you as your sins deserve because Jesus already was punished to give you peace with God. He prays that God continues to work through that Word so that you stay united to the Father.

By Jesus' work we have been declared not guilty of sin. By the Word he sanctifies, that is, he sets us apart as his own. We are no longer part of this world because unlike the world God sees you without sin. We are set apart from this world because we are not lost, we have been found and given saving faith in our hearts. You are not part of this world, you are part of God's family having been washed by water and the Word in Baptism. You are not part of this world, you are united with God and his people in the name of the Father. Yes, Jesus has returned to the Father. But he has not abandoned us or left us alone. He continues to be with us, strengthens us, guides us with that true Word that speaks through the lies of this world. Yes, Jesus rules over all things having ascended to heaven. But he is still with us and comes to us in the Lord's Supper to give us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

So what's the point of leaving us here then if he has gone through all this work for us? If we know that we are in the world that is full of bad apples, then why leave us here? Because we have the one thing that changes hearts that transforms the rotten core of sin into something that is pleasing and good in God's sight. You have the Gospel; you have the Word. The Word that unites you with the Father in his name keeps you in the name so that you have a place in heaven. The one thing that changed you and set you apart by Jesus you use for Jesus by sharing the Word with others. Amen.