

What would you say to your family or friends if you knew you only had a few hours to live? Three chapters of John's Gospel are devoted to some of Jesus' last words to His disciples before He is arrested, tortured, and crucified. These are certainly not the *last* words Jesus would say to His disciples, but they are important words as He approached the events of Good Friday.

Today's Gospel has a portion of what we call the High Priestly Prayer, that is, Jesus' words to God the Father. We get to hear these words today, and if Jesus' words to His disciples were important, these words prayed to the Father must be of critical importance. What does Jesus want the Father to do? Verse 11: **“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me...”**

Given this importance, we might ask why? Why does Jesus ask God to keep us in His name? Jesus answers this through three uses of the phrase “just as.” Our first “just as” verse 11: **“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, [just as] we are one.”** 3. He keeps us in His name for unity.

Let's take a step back and talk about what it means to be kept in the Father's name. To be kept in the Father's name means nothing else than to remain a Christian. This first happened at your baptism when God's name was first applied to you. This continues as you continue to participate in the body of Christ.

To participate in the body of Christ means to hear God's Word read, preached, and taught and to apply it to your life. To participate in the body of Christ means to regularly commune at this altar wherein we receive Christ's literal body and blood under bread and wine for forgiveness, life, and salvation. All of these things are part and parcel of the lifestyle of those who have been marked and kept in God's name.

But the overarching concern Jesus has in this passage is specifically for the importance of God's Word. He tells our Heavenly Father, **“I have given them your word...”** Jesus also says, **“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”** There is a deep concern that Jesus has for the disciples to be unified and that alone comes through hearing, reading, and inwardly digesting God's Word.

True story: a Lutheran pastor serves at a congregation with a preschool. A parent of one of the preschool students once came up to him and said, “I'd come to your church if you didn't talk about the Bible.” It makes one wonder, what is the Church for, then? That comment is like telling an auto mechanic, “I'd go to your garage as long as you didn't touch my car.” We live and die by the Words of the Bible. And studies prove that as we are kept steadfast in God's Word, we are indeed unified. It's funny how reality actually matches the truths of the Bible.

Ted Kober is a leader in a group called Ambassadors of Reconciliation. This is a consulting group that works to restore peace and harmony to conflicted churches. Using this experience and knowledge, Kober wrote the book *Built on the*

Rock: the Healthy Congregation. By the way, A copy is in the church library that anyone is welcome to check out. What's the sign of a successful, healthy congregation? Some might say having the right mission statement, others the right governing structure, still others say you need the right leadership. Other consultants might claim the key metric is numerical growth, and others might demand that a church have inspiring worship.

None of these things are bad—in fact, they are all helpful—but Kober says they are all distractions from the most important factor. Ted Kober's rule of thumb is that the churches that are best equipped to handle conflict have 20% or more of their average worship attendance regularly involved in an adult Bible study (*Built on the Rock*, 58). Keep in mind that doesn't mean there will be no conflict, simply that the conflict will be resolved in a healthy and Biblical manner.

Now, you're probably wondering, where does Faith Lutheran fit in? Based on some rough estimates earlier this week, I counted that about 40% to 50% of our average worship attendance is regularly involved in adult Bible study. And for that, I am grateful. I love to teach Bible studies, and I love it when we hear God's Word, grow in faith, and challenge one another in that setting. Imagine what the Lord could do among us if we had 60% attendance, 70%, 80%?!

Christ has given us His word, and this truth sanctifies us. It keeps us in His Holy name, and the result is unity. I pray that the Lord would continue to keep us in unity here in this place.

Back to our question, “Why does Jesus ask God to keep us in His name?” Second, 2. He keeps us in His name because we're strangers here. Our second “just as.” Verse 14: **“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.”** We need to be kept in God's name because we're not of this world, and the world hates us for it.

I remember on our honeymoon we went snorkeling in the ocean. It was fun to see all sorts of creatures in their natural habitat: sea turtles, sea urchins, tropical fish, and the like. I could have dived down and tried to pet the sea turtle or chased after some of the fish. But eventually, I would have had to come up for air.

Going snorkeling is something fun to do in an afternoon, but you couldn't live like that. You're not a fish or a mermaid. Humans are not made to live in the water. So too, Christians are born from above, they realize “...**the present form of the world is passing away**” (1 Cor 7:31). We are not made to live in this sinful, fallen creation.

Jimmy Buffett, a singer-songwriter, businessman, and one well acquainted with water and the ocean, once said the most frightening sea creature was a moray eel. Not sharks, octopuses, or squids, but the moray eel. Why? Because he had an encounter with one. He was searching for lobster in an underwater hole and instead an eel came out, and the eel wasn't too happy that Jimmy was invading his space.

Why does the world hate us? Why does the devil hate us? Because like that moray eel, we're invading its space. We as Christians have a message to share, and it may not always be what they want to hear. This word that Jesus has preached to us declares that we are sinners in need of a savior, and the world doesn't want to hear that their lifestyle is problematic. They think everything is just fine.

Thus, we will face persecution in this world. It shouldn't come as a surprise. It isn't the 1950s anymore, and Christianity does not hold the same prominent place it once did in our culture. Many of us will suffer for the name of Jesus.

What is the solution? The solution is not hating those who hate us. The solution is also not to circle the wagons and retreat into a Christian enclave. "Why does Jesus ask God to keep us in His name?" Our final "just as" 1. He keeps us in His name to go into the world. Jesus speaks to the Father saying, "[**Just**] **As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.**"

Likewise, Jesus says, "**I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.**" Luther once said that if getting to heaven was the only purpose in life, then you should strangle someone the second he or she was baptized. Obviously, that's an absurd statement, as Luther is often known to be outspoken and shocking. But the point still stands: there is work for us to do.

The atheist philosopher Frederick Nietzsche once said, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." Unfortunately for Nietzsche, his philosophy of nihilism meant there is no ultimate meaning, so Nietzsche would have to admit that he had no "why."

But you have been given a wonderful "why." This "why" can withstand any "how." The Apostle Paul puts it this way, "**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**" In baptism you have died and rose with Christ. You have been forgiven, been given a new life, and have the promise of the resurrection. You know that Jesus will come again to make all things right.

And there is joy in that. Joy isn't just a mental state, it is the hope that in Christ, everything will be okay. Even if the world hates you, even if they persecute you, even if you lose everything, you can gladly suffer it. You have been sent into the world to do good.

Good means loving your neighbor. You love your neighbor by caring for his or her bodily needs. You love your neighbor by being a friend to them when they are lonely. You love your neighbor by sharing the reason for the hope you have in you, so that they too might be marked with God's holy name and eternally saved. "Why does Jesus ask God to keep us in His name?" **GOD'S NAME UNIFIES CHRISTIANS TO GO OUT INTO THE WORLD EVEN AS STRANGERS.**