

Matthias the Apostle

Happy Mother's Day to all you moms, grandmas, and mother-figures here at New Hope, or tuning in through Facebook this morning. Our local church family has been, and continues to be, blessed through you. Thank you for the good work you've done, and keep on doing. You help us all continue to grow into better image-bearers of our Lord.

This morning we heard the account recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts, of the selection of Matthias as the twelfth disciple, after Jesus had ascended to heaven. Matthias had been involved with the disciples early on, however he wasn't part of Jesus' inner circle, from what we can tell. We don't really hear much about Matthias. He seems to fall out of the Bible record shortly after being mentioned in today's passage. According to some church traditions though, Matthias traveled as far away as the modern-day countries of Georgia and Azerbaijan, where he preached and taught about Jesus, and was martyred near the Caspian Sea.

Followers of Jesus in every age are called to live and lead changed lives. Today we're going to hear a piece of a prayer Jesus prayed in the upper room for His disciples on the night He was betrayed by Judas. If you have a Bible with the words of Jesus in red letters, you'll see that the Gospel lesson today is in red. Let's take a look at it together. Turn with me, if you will, to John 17:6-19. I'm reading from the New International Version this morning. **Read John 17:6-19.**

Jesus the Incarnate Word

There are a few things I want to point out about the first verse of the passage. Jesus says, "I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your Word," (John 17:6). I've capitalized the "Your Word," part of the end of that verse, and here's why. When you read the prologue – the beginning of John's Gospel – what's he say? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," (1:1).

Now there, the writer's referring to the presence of Jesus Christ at the creation. John refers to Jesus as the Word. Later on, he says, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us," (1:14). It stands to reason then, that since we're getting this statement of Jesus through the lens of the Gospel's author, that the Word here in verse 6 is Jesus, referring to Himself. He's talking with the Father about the people which the Father has given Him out of the world, and they are Jesus' people, because they have obeyed Jesus. His teaching, His commandment, to love God and others.

He elaborates on this in the next verse. “Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You,” (17:7). As Jesus’ followers today, we know who He is because God gave us the Bible, ears to hear its message, other people to present it to us, and willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to come in and transform – sanctify – us. We’ll cover this more in a just minute. We see throughout the Gospel accounts Jesus’ willingness to lay His own wants and desires aside in submission to the will of the Father. Everything Jesus does stems from the unconditional love the Father has for us, and His desire to have relationship with humanity.

People Generally Do Not Change

“I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them,” Jesus says next, “They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me,” (verse 8). Here again, we do not do this under our own power. Humans, relying on their own nature, generally do not change. It’s like Wimpy in the old Popeye cartoons. You know his famous line, church? “If you buy me a hamburger today, I will pay you back on Tuesday.” Well, Tuesday comes, and Wimpy’s still asking for people to buy him another hamburger. Until someone tells him he needs to pay for it himself, he’s not going to change. You could take this to any of the common “sins” known to humanity and apply it – theft, adultery, drug or alcohol abuse, greed. Unless something drastic happens, most of the time people continue in their habits.

A living interaction with Jesus is a life-changing, drastic event! Look what He says next. “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them,” (verses 9-10). It’s intriguing here that Jesus says He’s praying for His followers – and not for the world here. We’ll get into the specifics of what He’s praying about for His followers in a few verses. I want to try to work through this passage with you though, as it’s written, rather than bouncing all around in it.

Jesus predicts His death in the next verse. He says, “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are One,” (verse 11). The disciples in the upper room that night probably didn’t understand what Jesus was saying when He spoke this. Eventually, we read it earlier this morning, after the Resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven – He literally went up to God. Jesus, in this verse, prays for the protection of His disciples – and that includes us today, friends. He also prays for us to be united in mission with other Christ followers. That’s tough to do sometimes, because people want to focus on, and point out all the very human things we all do, instead of keeping our eyes fixed on the cross of Christ, where the grace of God flows down and drowns us in the precious Blood of the Lamb!

He Makes Us a New Creation

“While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave Me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled,” (verse 12). Jesus is speaking about Judas Iscariot here. I often wonder what Judas was out doing at this point. He had already left the Passover meal – that’s way back in chapter 13. By now, maybe he was counting out those thirty pieces of silver given to him by the chief priest.

Verse 13 seems to suggest that Jesus wants His disciples to hear this particular prayer, and to have joy in all circumstances. Speaking to the Father, He says, “I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them.” His next statement is even more profound: “I have given them Your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world,” (verse 14). See friends, when we really let the Holy Spirit take up residence in our hearts, we’re changed. We no longer fit the patterns of the world. He makes us a new creation.

The next verse, verse 15, is key to understanding exactly what Jesus was praying to the Father for His followers. He says, “My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.” That’s quite a statement by Jesus! Over the years I’ve heard various, well-meaning pastors and some televangelists say something along the lines of “Jesus is coming back!” He is, of course. People need to get right with God, because His return is a guaranteed thing. It’s in the Bible. But some of these guys make it sound like Jesus is riding on an elevator. He’s going to show up and secretly whisk people out of here one, two, I even heard a fairly famous television pastor out of Texas claim four times, before the second coming.

The Second Coming

I’m no Bible scholar, but friends, He’s already been here physically once – it’s in the Gospels. And people talk about the second coming. The Mystery of Faith contained in the Great Thanksgiving liturgy says, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” Apostles’ Creed says Jesus “will come again to judge the living and the dead.” When He comes back, that’s all she wrote, folks. There isn’t some secret coming and going, and snatching a few people here and there. When Jesus comes again, everyone is going to see Him and know He is God. It’s going to be a beautiful thing – and we’ll be there!

As the apostle Paul writes:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal

with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:51-58).

Jesus points out an interesting thing in the rest of today’s Gospel lesson. He says, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified,” (John 17:16-19). We no longer fit into the patterns of the sin-sickened world in which we find ourselves if we’re really following Jesus Christ. He asks the Father to sanctify us by the truth – and identifies God’s word as being the truth.

We Share Christ

We can take that a couple ways. The Bible is God’s word – it reveals truth to us. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, reveals truth to us through His words and actions contained on the pages of Holy Scripture. He says He sends us into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world. Why did Jesus come into the world? He came so we could have abundant life – by restoring us to right relationship with God the Father and with each other through His sacrificial death and resurrection.

Jesus expects us to carry that message along, and speak it into every situation and relationship which we experience. He calls us to be sanctified – made holy – as He is holy, and that’s a tall bill to fill because it cannot be just personal holiness. We should be personally holy, but we miss the mark if we aren’t also focusing on social holiness. We have to meet people where they are – which includes them being still lost in their sins. We share Christ. This is who we are, as United Methodists.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote something nearly three hundred years ago, that is still very applicable today. He wrote:

Solitary religion is not to be found here. ‘Holy Solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than Holy Adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.¹

Prayer: Gracious God, in the resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ, You have given us eternal life and glorified Your name in all the world. Refresh our souls with living streams of Your truth, that in our unity, Your joy may be complete. Amen.

¹ John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, page viii.