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Easter 7
20 May 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
John 17:11b-19

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Two trees get planted side by side.

They're young, scrawny trees—you couldn't distinguish them if it wasn't for the tags.

These two trees become more and more recognizable as they grow.

And finally, when they begin to bear fruit, everyone knows there's a difference.

The one tree produces mulberries, the other crabapples.

Two different trees, distinguished by their fruits.

And so it is for us.

We're planted in a very large garden; we're in this world.

And it's not just us, Christians, who are wandering about—

no, we're mixed in fairly well with all sorts of people, all sorts of beliefs and practices.

And so the question is: How are we to be distinguished?

How can you tell us apart?

Or, more related to the Gospel for today:

Does the world hate you because you are not *of the world*?

How would someone know who is *of the world* and who isn't?

It's all in the fruits.

A Christian is one who bears good fruit.

A Christian keeps the Law, doing all that the Lord has spoken.

A Christian believes, trusts, and is confident in Christ alone.

A Christian loves her older sister, despite the fact that she's bossy and controlling.

A Christian cringes when he hears a coworker speaking about another colleague unflatteringly.

A Christian cares for the needy, volunteers at the Lord's Diner, and provides for the homeless.

A Christian rejoices in the fellowship shared around the altar:

he repents of his sin,

confesses his Lord,

and believes the Gospel that Jesus died for all

and that forgiveness is given in His name, alone.

A Christian thinks, speaks, and acts in a way that the world finds strange.

So does the world find you strange?

Can the world tell you apart, can it see your fruit?

Do your words and thoughts and life just grate on the world's sensibilities?

If not, why not?

Why are you fitting in?
 Why are you loved by those who reject Christ?
 Is there even a difference?

We Christians sometimes fit in so well because we like to fit in.
 We hate the loneliness and the rejection, and we certainly don't want to be hated.
 And then we justify ourselves by thinking we can go *incognito*—
 that we can fool the world by tricking it into accepting Christ—
 and by Christ, we mean us.

Repent.

To be friends with the world is to be an enemy of Christ.

But you are in Christ.
 And so you are an enemy of this world.
 You are hated, loathed, and persecuted simply by being a Christian.
 That's the way you've been planted—
 even if you haven't yet grown up enough to start showing your fruit.

Christianity will never be loved by the world.
 It'll never embrace us.
 Sure, various governments have claimed to be favorable to Christianity—
 but it's not a true Christianity they like.

They like a good-moral-ed Christianity.
 They like citizens who behave well and keep the peace.
 They like charity and care for those who suffer.
 And that's good—about the best we can hope for from this world.

But they hate your holiness.
 They hate your confidence.
 They hate your freedom and they hate your joy.

For so they hated Christ.

He was different.
 He was free.
 He thought and spoke and lived as if the Father alone was His source of joy and life.
 He didn't fear their threats or their whips.
 He didn't follow their leadership manuals or their techniques for success.
 He didn't force anyone to do things His way, and He didn't care about numbers.
 He was not *of the world*.

And neither are you.

But we're always being tempted to fit in.
 We're always tempted to not be so radical, so one-sided, so exclusive, so sure.
 We're tempted to think in the way of the world, to speak it's way of speaking, and to live it's way of living.

And what is the way of the world?
 What is so enticing and alluring and tempting?

It's all in whose word is trusted.
 The world lets us trust our own words.
 It lets us do the thinking and speaking and living—
 in the world, it's all about me.

The world is full of words, *our* words, *our* opinions, *our* beliefs, *our* interpretations,
 and so *our* confusions.

Whenever we're left with *our* word or thought or life, we're on very shaky ground.
 Because our words often lie, they deceive, they hide, and they hurt.

But not so with our Lord.
 His Word *is truth*.

And this is why the world hates you:
 Jesus says, "**I have given them Your Word**" (Jn 17:14).

That word, that promise, that true and certain reality that comes from the mouth of God—
 that word sets you apart from this world.

Another way of saying "set apart" is to say "holy."
 You are *holy, set apart, sanctified* by this word—
 not *your* word, but *His* Word.

But you can't get that Word unless you have a Matthias, from our first reading today.
 That is, you can't be given the Word of promise, without someone to proclaim it to you.
 And there aren't any proclaimers of this Word without Matthias, and the other 11 Apostles.

These 12 Holy Apostles are proclaimers of this Word because they were *witnesses* of this Word.
 They were with Christ, the Word made flesh,
 from His baptism by John 'til His Ascension, just this past Thursday.
 And as witnesses of the Word, they are now proclaimers of that same word:
 Christ crucified *for you*.
 They are the givers of this gift.
 They are those who sanctify you in the truth, because the Word they preach is truth.

Our Lord doesn't want to take you out of this world.
 He doesn't establish various Christian ghettos before He ascends into heaven.

No, instead He institutes His Church.

He calls servants of the Word to proclaim His Word to the next generation.

And in this preaching, in the administration of this Word, our Lord fulfills and accomplishes that for which He prays.

Today's Gospel is a prayer.

It's a prayer for all of us young, scrawny trees, hardly distinguishable from the world,
whose fruit is starting to bud, at best.

It's a prayer that we wouldn't be swept away by all the false words of this world, but be kept in His word.

His Word sets us apart.

His Word is holy—and whenever we come in contact with the holy, we ourselves become holy.

And so you were made holy at the font of Baptism, where the Word was poured on your heads,
and the Name of God put upon you.

You're made holy every time you gather around this Holy Word,
every time it's preached, or read, or heard.

You're made holy by partaking of Holy Communion—the Sacramental Word.

It's this Holy Word that we gather around even at home, with our families.

And by this our homes are sanctified, and so are our families are made holy together.

“For,” as St. Paul says, “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, *for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*” (1 Tim 4:4-5)

And you are made holy by the Word of God—

by Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Communion.

And each of these you have received from a Matthias, from one standing in this apostolic office.

Because that is why the Holy Ministry was established by our Lord—

“So that we may obtain this faith...” (AC V).

And with this faith, with this good planting, we will bear fruit.

And by bearing fruit, we will be hated.

But do not fear, for you are also loved.

You are loved by God in Christ.

So He sends His Holy Spirit, sanctifying us by this Word—week in and week out, even daily.

And He does it so that we might be one, just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

And by being made one—one with God and one with each other—we may have joy.

And that, O scrawny, little tree, is the fruit you will bear—both now and ever more!

For you are forgiven. You are holy.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit