

Amen. brother. I'm not sure how many times I was asked this past week whether I heard that cry when I visited St. James in East Cleveland last Sunday. For those of you who did not talk with me about it this week, the answer is there were only a few, rather quiet Amens.

But I hear that here there were more.

Now I expect that today, I won't ~~have~~^{have} a single one. But I'll bet the place is hopping over on Hayden Avenue.

A cultural difference.

Their first hymn today was Blessed Assurance. I know because that is their first hymn each Sunday of the Easter season. And here, today we sang, Gather us in, an improvement over the usual fare in some of your minds, for others of you my choice of hymn today leaves a lot to be desired. Cultural differences.

Some of you think we should all be dressed in our Sunday best when we gather here. Others of you are convinced that being in comfortable clothes is a better choice. A cultural difference.

I like classical music, some of you like country, some easy listening, some rock. Now which is better for worshipping God. Is classical more Christian than a country sound, rock less religious? Jesus listened to none of them when he walked the roads of Galilee. *When we disagree we miss, the reason is a cultural difference.*

When missionaries first went to Africa and India and Asia, they took a culture with them. They wanted people to dress like Europeans, talk like Europeans, think like Europeans. They wanted people to know that Jesus spoke with an English Accent, a German accent. Culture.

I mention this because as we hear the gospel today, we must be able to make a distinction between what is cultural and what is Christian. For JEsus prayed: I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the

world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

What does it mean not to belong to the world, but to belong to Christ? Jesus does not tell us that. Every age must figure that out.

I remember my first parish, members there told of parents who would not allow their children to go to movies. They were not allowed to dance, nor play games with a deck of cards. For those parents avoiding such things was what it meant to be in the world but not to belong to the world.

If only they could see the movies now, or an afternoon slate of talk shows. Or a few sitcoms. Or the soaps.

When our children were young, Sue and I faced a dilemma. We did not like what we were seeing on TV. We wanted to restrict our children from watching some of the shows. But when we announced our decision this was their response: If we don't watch these shows that all our friends are watching when we go to school and everyone is talking about them, we are outsiders.

Sue and I made some compromises with them. We limited the amount of TV, we let them watch some shows that we were not very comfortable with. *we knew our children had to be in the world, we hoped they would not be lost to the world.*
I bought a pair of walking shoes. I got a real deal, 39 dollars for Nike Cross trainers, leather. The very next morning I opened the Plain Dealer, Bill Livingston was complaining about Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods endorsing Nike. Livingston told of how their shoes are produced, the poor of Malaysia receive \$2.20 for a 12 hour day. He told of a supervisor, whose wife was ill who sought some time to be with her who was fired. The column was complaining about 40 million dollar endorsement packages. It might also have complained about my seeking a bargain at the expense of the poor.

Can a Christian be a part of our economic system where the highest good and only standard is profit? Can Christians measure themselves and their neighbors by money, possessions, clothing? Are these cultural issues, or things that are basic to the Christian faith?

You do not belong to the world, said Jesus.

Jesus prayed for his followers, and for us, those who would believe because of their word on the night of his betrayal. He prayed. They do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth, your word ~~is~~ is truth.

Jesus prayed. Just as he was about to receive the world's verdict on himself, he prayed.

Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.

Sanctify, set them apart in the truth.

The truth is that we cannot have it both ways. We cannot belong to the world and belong to the one whom the world crucified. I would like to if Jesus would give me a list of ten or twenty dos and don'ts so that I would know how to belong to him and not to the world, and how to tell you to raise your children so they would belong to Jesus and not to the world. Instead he gives us his word, God's word.

He prayed, I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

God's word. The guidance that you and I need to live as those who belong to Jesus is in the holy scriptures. If we are filling our hearts and minds in what comes to us from the media, and not filled with what God speaks, we will end up being owned by the world, shaped and molded by Hollywood. If our children only feed on what they are offered in music, and movie, and talk show, they will belong to the world.

God's word. We as a people here, need a revival of study and sharing and praying in God's word. Individually, in small groups, in our worship God is sanctifying us in truth, for God's word is truth.

Too long the habit has been that I will be the expert, you relying on me. God calls you to be the experts, growing daily in faith and understanding, sharing the faith that is in you as you live in God's word.

When I think of the future of this congregation, there are many cultural expressions we could adopt. Musical, social. We could invest all of our time and energy in adjusting to these changes, arguing differences.

But I am convinced that the life of this congregation and for all of your mothers and fathers the life of your families depends on being immersed in God's word. Then as the world is changing in every way, we will be rooted in the changeless love of him who prayed for us:

Sanctify them in the truth, your word us truth. Amen.