

"Out of This World"
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First Congregational Church of East Hartford
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John 17:6-19

Being a Christian can be like a fish trying to ride a bicycle. [show bulletin picture]

As Christians we are called to forgive,
 when the world is quick to blame, sue, and sentence.
As Christians we are called to care for the poor,
 yet the world consistently and wrongly blames poverty on people who are poor.
As Christians we are invited to hope in eternal life,
 yet the world tries to hide from the reality of death.
As Christians we are invited to care for all of creation,
 yet the world glorifies the massive consumption of fossil fuels that are destroying
creation.
As Christians we are called to generously share with others,
 yet the world advertises the glory of stored up wealth.
As Christians we are called to work together as one body to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven,
 yet the world encourages individuals to compete against each other.

Living into our calling as Christians can feel like a fish trying to ride a bicycle.
This morning I invite you to consider how to be a fish trying to ride a bicycle,
 how to be a Christian in our modern world.

PRAYER

You don't need to raise your hands, but who here has ever felt left out?
 I'm certain there are folks here this morning who at one point or another didn't quite fit in.
Maybe you were a nerd or didn't wear the right cloths or felt ashamed about who you are.

The early Christians who composed the Gospel of John totally did not fit in.
 They were being persecuted and rejected by the communities of their birth and the wider
society.

It was in that context our scripture this morning ought to be read -
 Jesus is speaking of the disciples as being separate from the world.
 Of the world even hating them.
 [It may sound rather dualistic to us, but]

The early Christians understood what it felt like to be separated from the world around them.
Today in America,
 being Christian is not a life-threatening identity that forcefully separates us from society.
However, if we are really living into our calling as Christians,
 we won't always fit in and feel comfortable.

We are going to feel like fish out of water.
 We can think of the water as being the Kingdom of God,
 where there is forgiveness, compassion, and enough for all.
As Christians, we look and see that Kingdom,

God made us and formed us to live in this Kingdom;
We were made to live in a sea of compassion and love,
yet we are not fully living in it -
instead we are on this earth, in this world,
where corruption, greed, and scarcity threaten to drive out compassion.

So, how do we as Christians live in this world?
What do we do when we don't fit in?
What does a fish do when thrown out of its ocean or river or lake?
There are at least 2 options

Option One:

Get into a fish tank - living in a mini-ideal world.

Throughout history Christians have gathered in monasteries, convents or tight-knit communities attempting to live outside of the world.

(not all convents work like this, but some have)

The idea is to try to live in a heaven on earth.

They make a sort of isolate fish bowl.

We might do this without officially joining a religious order -
we can surround ourselves with people who are similar to us, who we are comfortable with
and be really good at being compassionate and forgiving -
with people we already get along with.

We make a fish bowl with our friends,
and attempt to live out the ideals of the Kingdom of Heaven,
with a select few.

The rest of the world can come, look at the fish bowl and perhaps be inspired to go back to the world and live differently.

Indeed, many monasteries, convents, and tight-knit communities can and have provided much needed havens, safe spaces, and sources of inspiration.

So, when we feel like we don't fit in,
we can seek out and surround ourselves with people like ourselves.
This may make sense at times when we feel threatened, especially because of a particular identity we hold. [ex. AA? Women's Groups? GSA?]

As Christians, one way to try to live out our calling in this world, is to join an isolated religious order or participate in a relatively closed Christian community.
We can jump into a fish bowl and swim around in a comfortable & semi-ideal world.

Another option is to take the sponge-bob approach.

Who has seen sponge-bob square pants?

Sandy, the squirrel, lives under the sea.

She is able to do so with a sort of astronaut costume - she wears a helmet of air.

SO, another way to deal with being a Christian in our world, or a fish out of water is to put on a water helmet.

This means we are still present in the world, with all its struggles,
- the body of the fish is trying to ride the bicycle,

but we survive by also being connected to our life-source,
- we got that water helmet on.

Indeed, this is what Jesus is praying for in our scripture this morning.
He explicitly asks that we not be taken out of this world,
but instead asks that we be one - connected to each other and to the Triune God.
In our scripture this morning, he asks only once that "they may all be one"
but if we keep reading, he asks over and over again,
pleading that his disciples might be one with each other and God.

As fish out of water, as Christians in an imperfect world,
we are invited to stay connected to each other and to the One who sent us -
to wear water helmets as it were
- to be both in the world and in the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus describes
- to live in the world and to strive for a better way,
a way marked by compassion and care.

As Christians we are called to forgive,
while the world is quick to blame, sue, and sentence,
every week we unite as one with each other and God,
for our time of confession to remember that no one is perfect
and then do our best to practice forgiveness with those beyond these walls.

As Christians we are called to care for the poor,
while the world consistently and wrongly blame poverty on people who are poor,
we unite as one with faith communities in EH to provide food and housing support to
those in need.

As Christians we are invited to hope in eternal life,
while the world tries to hide from the reality of death,
we unite as one with each other and God for funerals and proclaim that Christ is Risen.

As Christians we are called to generously share with others,
while the world advertises the glory of stored up wealth,
we unite as one with each other and God,
each pitching in for a fun golf tournament to support the ministry of the church,
every week in our time of offering we practice giving,
and by sharing our building & resources with the surrounding community.

As Christians we are called to work together to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven,
while the world encourages individuals to compete against each other,
we partner with other churches for Lent programs, CROP Walks, and worship.
we send our pastor to meet with Christian denominations across the country to address
issues of inter-religious peace and mass incarceration.
we unite as one with each other and God to be a community, in the midst of an
individualistic society.

If we follow the call set before us as Christians,
we will probably feel like fish out of water.

Thank God we can unite with one another and God to put on water helmets.
With the power of unity and the vision of the what can be,
May we have the courage to jump out into the world
and be a blessing to those around and beyond us.
Amen.