

The First Reading is from Psalm 1:1-6 NRSV

¹ Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;

² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

³ They are like trees

planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴ The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The Second Reading is from John 17:6-19 NRSV

⁶ "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that ^[a] you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, ^[b] so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ^[c] ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ^[d] ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

The Message: E Cubed

Did you open a newspaper, surf an internet news site or listen to a newscast before arriving at church this morning? In case you didn't, let me just assure you that the world is a mess globally and locally.

Escalating trade wars. Gaza militants fire rockets and Israel retaliates with airstrikes. At least a 100 killed in Nicaragua as violence intensifies. On Friday, I opened the Daily Facts to read that two bodies were found dead in a Yucaipa home. An email Friday morning reminded me that it was Gun Violence Awareness Day and the start of #wearorange weekend to honor the victims and survivors of gun violence from Columbine to Sandy Hook, from Pulse Night Club to Las Vegas, from Emmanuel AME in Charleston to Sutherland Springs, from Virginia Tech to Santa Fe, Texas where 10 students and teachers died on May 18th. Then there is the reality of children being separated from parents at our own borders, as well as 22 million other refugees worldwide who have fled their homelands for fear of their lives.

The needs in our own community are enough to exhaust us – children who will go hungry this summer once school meals are not available, battered and abused youth who have chosen the street rather than stay in their homes with parents who have drug or alcohol substance abuse problems, homeless adults who wander our streets, veterans struggling with combat related traumas, single moms barely making ends meet, those struggling with addictions, to name just a few of the issues in our community. Yes, the needs in our own community are enough to exhaust us. The first “E” word of my sermon entitled E-cubed is exhaustion and exhaustion is certainly understandable given the state of our world.

But what does this have to do with our text from the Gospel of John? Well, first let me give the passage some context. Our text is part of Jesus’ final prayer before he is betrayed by Judas and arrested. In the preceding chapter, Jesus clearly tells his disciples that he will no longer be with them, so he offers words of encouragement to his disciples given the reality of the world they find themselves in. Jesus said, “In the world you [will] face persecution but take courage; I have conquered the world.” “Take courage,” Jesus says to his disciples and to us. Take courage for the reality of the world is not the whole story.

Jesus gives this encouragement and then he looks heavenward and prays. His whole prayer captured in chapter 17 has three sections. Jesus begins by praying for himself. In the second section Jesus prays for his disciples and finally Jesus concludes by praying for all who will come to believe. Our text today is Jesus’ prayer for his disciples.

I wonder if any other E-words came to mind as you heard the text read, especially given a phrase that occurred not just once but twice. In case you missed it, here is the phrase: “They [the disciples] do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” We do not belong to the world said Jesus, just as Jesus doesn’t belong to the world.

Could the second E-word be escape? Is Jesus’ prayer an escape clause for us? That is, that although the world is a mess, we don’t have to concern ourselves with the way things are, since we are not of this world. We are free to withdraw, avoid, and ignore the problems of the world, it’s not ours anyway. We are not of this world so we can escape to the comfort of our own homes and the comfort of our church community. We can enjoy worshipping God while escaping the world around us, oblivious to the hunger, homelessness, and poverty just outside. With fashionable not of this world blinders, we can escape from the messes of this world since we are not of this world.

Jesus says this not once but twice, yet I’m sure you realize that “escape” is not the E-word we are looking for. Jesus’ declaration that we are not of this world is not an escape clause. It is simply a reminder that the ways of the world are not to shape our identity and values as people of faith. As Eugene Peterson puts it, “They didn’t the join the world’s ways

[and] are no more defined by the world, than I am defined by the world.” Our psalmist also has some clarifying words of wisdom for us, saying, “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.” In other words, don’t join the ways of the world. That is, the ways of the world are not to shape us. We are not to clamor for power, prestige, or wealth. We are not to focus only on ourselves. We are not the center of the universe. We are not to be defined by the ways of the world.

We are not of this world, but we are to be in the world. Jesus makes it pretty clear in his prayer that there is no escape from the reality of the world as it is. As disciples, we are not to abandon the world, rather we are to be engaged in the world. Engaged, not escape is our second E word.

Listen again to what Jesus prayed, for he said, “I am not asking you [God] to take them out of the world but protect them. [For] as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” We are to be engaged in the reality of the world around us. We are to be engaged in a way that brings joy, delight and glory to God. We are to be engaged in the transforming work of God. Jesus even prayed, “I have been glorified in them.” Jesus was glorified by his engaged disciples.

God could right the messes of this world without help, yet God invites us to participate and then waits for us to engage in the work of righting the messes of the world. Active engagement in this work brings glory to God. I wonder, is our engagement as disciples bringing glory to God? Are we engaging in God’s work as individuals and as a church in righting the messes of the world?

Yet, I’ll be the first to admit that engagement can cause exhaustion, because there is always more than enough to do. There is never enough time to do what needs to be done. The needs often do not seem like they diminish, even as we work towards alleviating the issues and concerns that plague our world. The messes of this world only seem to escalate.

I remember my first recollection of random gun violence – a McDonalds in San Ysidro, yet the scope and frequency of gun violence continues to escalate. I remember seeing a few individuals standing at the bottom of off ramps when I was growing up, but now almost every city in America is struggling to address the growing populations of those without homes in our communities. It has been 60 years since Martin Luther King Jr said, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of the week is the eleven o’clock on Sunday morning,” yet as a religious article recently confessed, “So little has changed.” Divisions in our communities and country are like wounds that never seem to heal.

Work has been done though. We have been engaged. Disciples throughout the ages have worked to alleviate hunger, illiteracy, homelessness, violence, and injustices, yet there is still more to do. Is it any wonder that exhaustion can still set in?

Yet Jesus prayed, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world.” Jesus is not praying for our escape; Jesus is praying for us to stay the course no matter how difficult it is. Jesus is praying for us to stay engaged in the mess of this world. “But, how?” as I wrote in the margins of a commentary. How are we to be energized for continual engagement given the overwhelming needs of our world?

Did you catch the third E-word? It is energized. How do we stay energized for ministry? I suggest the psalmist has some insights again for us. Listen again to the psalmist’s wisdom, “Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditate day and night on God’s

law.” God’s law – love God, love neighbor – is a source of energy for us. God’s whole revelation through God’s word is a source of energy for us. Why? As Paul said to Timothy, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful... for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Our scriptures bear witness to a God that never gives up on us, for God’s love is steadfast and God’s faithfulness is from generation to generation.

Listen again to a description of those who are energized by God’s word, “They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.”

Imagine a beautiful tree with its roots sunk deeply into nutrient rich soil near an ever-flowing stream. Can’t you envision the sturdiness of the trunk as it supports branches that are broad and high? Branches that are magnificently adorned with abundant leaves, leaves that do not wither. The psalmist imagines the tree bearing fruit in its due season again and again and again. Does this image resonate with you? You are to be like this tree! Do you feel like a healthy fruit bearing tree planted by an abundant source of water?

Or are you withering? Are your leaves parched and burnt given all that is demanded of you in this messed up world?

Exhaustion is real, but engagement is our calling. We are sent into the world by Jesus. Hence, why we need to be connected to our source of energy. The psalmist makes it clear – they meditate day and night. What scriptures are restorative to you?

“Do not fear I have redeemed you; I have called you by name and you are mine... you are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you.” “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Are you connected to this source of energy? “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” God’s word is a source of energy for us or as Peterson suggests we should be chewing on scripture day and night. Our story of faith as recorded in scripture is a source of energy for us, yet we must partake of it.

Jesus continued to pray saying, “Protect them... so that they may be one, as we are one.” “So, they can be one heart and mind, as we are one heart and mind.” Is there a oneness of heart and mind between you and God? Do we even know the heart and mind of God? Well, we can’t possibly know God’s heart and mind unless we are in God’s word. We can’t possibly know unless we are cultivating an ever-deepening relationship with the Divine Mystery.

But, how? I believe each of us have different rhythms when it comes to being in the word and nurturing our relationship with God. What works for me, may not work for you. So, as I share what keeps me energized for engagement in the messes of the world, reflect on what might work for you.

Spending time in God’s first word – nature – energizes my soul – my early morning walks as dawn turns to daylight, enjoying the abundant life in and around my backyard pond while listening to the cascading water, awareness of humming birds, a flock or even a bird song in the middle of the day. The natural world energizes my soul for engagement. God’s written word is a source of energy, as I read of it daily. A well-worn passage will surprise me with new insights, and this is certainly one of the reasons I appreciate Sunrise Lectio Divina. A posture of silence

before God is another source of energy for me, as it has been said that silence is God's first language. When I offer my exhaustion to God and then sit in silence renewed energy often comes in unexpected ways. I also enjoy the spiritual discipline of journaling and I am often surprised as the words seem to just flow from my pen. I engage in community with others – a contemplative community I have been a part of for more than 10 years, my new clergy groups here in Redlands, my spiritual director who helps me listen to God's movement in my life. With others I am energized for continual engagement.

What about you? What intentional practices do you have in your life to be connected to our source of energy for engaging the world? The world is exhausting, yet our call is to be engaged in bringing a bit of heaven on earth – one starfish at a time – so trust the source, trust God to be your provision so that you may be energized for engagement in the messes of this world. Amen.