

## **EASTER 7B**

## **“We Are Fighting Behind Enemy Lines”**

**John 17:11b-19**

Today is/Yesterday was Armed Forces Day. We thank all those who have served or who currently do serve in a branch of our nation’s armed forces. Militaristic images in the church have fallen out of favor in the politically correct cultural climate of some Christian church bodies. There is no more singing of “Onward Christian Soldiers” in such places. But we are using those images in worship here at St. John's this weekend to describe what Jesus prays about us to His heavenly Father in John 17, that we are in the world, but not of the world. Spiritually speaking, we are guerilla warriors fighting battles behind enemy lines. We are members of a resistance movement in a world that is opposed to us because it is opposed to our leader. We do not belong to this world, but we are here as witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ to this world and its people who see Him as their enemy. Jesus makes us holy by His death and resurrection. He then sends us holy people into the world with His word of truth as our weapon of war.

### **I. We Are Not of the World**

#### **A. We Live in the Land of the Evil One**

The unbelieving world living in rebellion against its Creator looks upon Christians as being spiritual terrorists. Having God’s inspired Word of the Holy Bible as our weapon, we are armed with a message that knocks down the tall towers of this world’s self-righteousness and threatens the spiritual security of people’s sinful natures. When it comes to determining our personal value, recognizing the value of other people’s lives, taking care of our own lives and using God’s gift of our sexuality, even our own sinful nature collaborates with the enemy, so ingraining itself within us that we believe this world’s wickedness is real and that God’s righteousness is fantasy.

But it has been that way for all of human history. God spoke through His ancient prophet Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” If we are too earthly-minded, how will we be of any heavenly good? If we find ourselves fitting in & agreeing with the ways of this world, how can we expect to be comfortable living in heaven as our home?

#### **B. We Are Fighting a Different Kind of War**

In the midst of this world, God calls us to be soldiers fighting for life behind enemy lines. But there are two major differences in our Christian warfare from the usual kind of fighting. Instead of being our enemies, we see our opponents as objects of our love, which is really God’s love for them. As Christian soldiers we can and should reject sinful behavior while at the same time still loving those who behave sinfully. After all, that is how God treats us in Jesus, sinners and saints in His sight.

Secondly, instead of being trained to kill our opponents, as God's guerilla warriors we are giving life to those who are opposed to us. Our love for those who hate us and our offer of life for those who despise how God wants us to live go against human reason. This is completely foreign to the ways of the world. But that is what makes our behind-the-lines warfare so special. It is from out of this world! Why is it that we do what we do?

## II. Jesus Is Sent Into the World

### A. Jesus Prays for Our Protection

Our motivation comes from the voice of our text. This is what Jesus prays on behalf of His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. By His divine power Jesus has protected His chosen followers from physical harm and defended them from spiritual defeat, with the exception of Judas whose betrayal and suicide are mentioned in our first reading from Acts 1. Now that Jesus no longer would be with His followers in a physical way, He prays that His heavenly Father would grant gracious protection to them.

### B. Jesus Sanctifies Himself by His Death and Resurrection

Jesus will no longer be with His disciples because He has important work to do. Jesus is the one God had promised to be the Savior of the world who would pay the price of His life on account of our sins. Jesus is the one who gives us a way out of the fantasy land of our sinful existence into the reality of true life as God's people. Jesus has sanctified Himself by His innocent death on the cross. Jesus has sanctified Himself by His resurrection from the dead. Jesus has sanctified Himself by ascending to His rightful place of honor and glory in heaven.

## III. Jesus Sends Us Into the World

### A. We Have His Joy

All Jesus does for Himself He really is doing for us. His death is for our forgiveness. His resurrection is for our life. His ascension is to prepare a home in eternal life for us. This work of Jesus gives us complete joy. Our joy is that the burden of our sins is now removed from us. Our joy is that sin's separation from our loving God now is over. Our joy is that the threat of eternal punishment now is gone. All of Jesus' complete joy is given to us in our holy baptism. There forgiveness of sins, new life and eternal salvation are God's gifts to us in water combined with God's Word. For each of us our baptism is the daily reminder of God's love and Jesus' life for us.

## B. We Have the Truth of Jesus' Word

As God's warriors behind enemy lines, we are armed with the most powerful weapon of all, His Word of truth. Because of that we will face great opposition. The enemies of God do not want to hear His Word proclaimed to them. They will wear a mask over their souls and keep their spirits socially distanced from God's message of law and gospel as if it were the plague. In this post-modern world the only truth that people are willing to agree with is that there is no truth. But there is God's truth.

God's truth works like gravity. We may fight against it and want to deny it, but ultimately it makes its presence felt. Men, in our younger days we have our strength and bulk up in our chests. Over time gravity has its way and forces our girth to slide down to our gut. (It's my story and I'm sticking with it. Doggone gravity!) Likewise, we may try to deny the truth of God's Word, live contrary to it, ignore it, and not study it, but ultimately we cannot resist its power for our lives.

God's word is His gift to us, it is a means of our salvation. It is the plan of battle we use to give life to those people who might now hate us, but we love them. God's Word is our general's way of communicating to us, His behind-the-lines soldiers, to keep us fully informed of our mission, that all may come to know the truth of God's grace in Jesus Christ and be saved from their sins.

### Conclusion:

We have different deployments in God's army: serving in a school, at our job, in our neighborhood, among our family, or with our friends; but as God's guerrilla warriors, we have the same mission, the salvation of people. We also have the same weapon, the Word of God. Most of all, we have the same leader, Jesus Christ, our holy Savior who has lived, died, risen and ascended so that we can live now and forever as the protected people of our holy heavenly Father. In Jesus' name. AMEN