

Global Christian Forum
GG3 – Morning reflection, John 17
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John 17:13-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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. 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 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.

This is the word of God for the people of God.

I considered inviting our readers to read the gospel text all together, at the same time, in their various languages. Imagine the chaos, the noise. A little taste of Pentecost right here in Bogotá.

As we come together from all around the world for this 3rd Global Gathering, we celebrate the mutual respect and love that mark our time together. This text from the gospel of St John reminds of that respect and that love that the triune God makes possible for us. The text also tells us of the cost of this love.

Look at your name badge? What does it say?

If I ask you, “Where are you from?” How will you answer?

In Jesus’ prayer in John 17, Jesus gives us an answer to the question, Where are you from? He says:

Not from this world.

Now there’s a weird identity!

Jesus’ prayer is set within the context of Jesus’ love and care for his disciples. It is a prayer that mixes up present and future. In John 16:33 Jesus speaks of being of good cheer because he has already overcome the world, yet this is all before the crucifixion.

It is a prayer about unity and evangelism, and living as God's people in a world that does not like us.

Jesus makes 4 requests in this selection of verses:

1. He prays the disciples may have his joy
2. He prays that they be protected from the evil one.
3. He prays twice that they be sanctified in the truth.

Yet, in a text about love and truth and unity and complete joy, Jesus says we will be hated.

The word of Jesus is truth and light. So why is it hated? It is hated because the type of holiness for which Jesus prays, the type of love which we are to show one another, is the type of love that threatens the powers of this world.

Jesus prays that this little band of disciples will be so peculiar band that those who meet them & see their love might actually think that they are not from this world.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples becomes his prayer for us. This is our story. It is an invitation that we join in God's mission as Jesus continues with his prayer in John 17:23 – "so that the world may know..." Our gathering here in Bogotá is a sign that points to Jesus and to the love that only he makes possible between us.

More than that – we have no part in God's mission if we cannot love as God loves.

If we make Jesus' prayer our own, if we pray that God sanctify us, that God's truth and love be known in this gathering, are we really ready for God to answer our prayers?

The holiness & love that Jesus prays for is about displaying our radical difference, showing the marks of God's ownership. It is a text about answering the question, where are you from?

It is a text about belonging; about true citizenship and showing how strange to the world is the life in Christ. It is the strangeness of trusting in what God has promised. Do you trust God to answer your prayer?

If we do trust, then as Jesus says, we should expect to be hated. He had already warned the disciples of this in John 15:18.

"If the world hates you be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own... Because you do not

belong to the world... the world hates you.”

It is distinctly uncomfortable not to belong. Perhaps you feel you don't belong here. But in this text Jesus pushes it further. It's more than uncomfortable, it means you'll be hated.

When we think of hate, joy is not the first thing that comes to mind. And yet this is the first request Jesus makes: “I speak these things so that they may have my joy made complete” (v. 13).

Jesus is not asking them or us to laugh at hatred, to dismiss the suffering that so many Christians face for the sake of their faith. Not at all. Indeed there is a call for mourning, for lament, for coming together alongside those who suffer and who are persecuted. Doing so has been a hallmark of those in the Global Christian Forum.

This is not a text that makes light of suffering or hatred.

This is a text about belonging and about being joyful in our heavenly citizenship; about showing the peculiar people that we are because we have all been called by God.

If you ask me, “Where are you from?” I might say I'm from São Paulo, Brazil. I'll say my grandmother was from the Tupi-Guarani tribe and my grandfather was half German, half Portuguese. I'm married to a north American and I live in England.

But no matter where I am – in Colombia, in the UK, in Lebanon or Tanzania last month, when I see the green and yellow of the Brazilian flag over on the television for a football game, my heart is strangely warmed.

During the World Cup, I am 1000% Brazilian. It's not a thoughtful, rational decision, made under careful consideration whether ours is a good team or not. That does not matter. It is a joyful sense of belonging.

My joy in being Brazilian during the World Cup is just a faint echo of what Jesus is saying here.

Jesus says, share that excitement when it comes to your origin in God. Be thrilled because you have been chosen from above, you are not of this world, and I have brought you together in love!

I belong to Jesus and I belong to you much more than I belong to Brazil's football team. You are my identity markers.

Where are we from? We are from another world, a world formed and chosen and redeemed by God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

We are called to show God's light, to be the joy and love of Jesus to those we serve.

Through Jesus & the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has given us another origin, another belonging, another identity in which we are to be joyful. Jesus said to Nicodemus, it is an identity born from above and it is an identity that we share with Jesus himself.

v. 18: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."
Jesus sends those who share in his homeland. He has given us his word, he has given us his light & his truth. He has given us himself and as we share life in him, we shine his light.

Let mutual love continue! Through our love the world will come to know the one true God. What greater promise, what greater incentive could there be for us indeed to show that love to God and to one another?

This isn't just a global gathering. We are a light, the light of Christ, as St Paul says in Philippians, a light shining like stars in a dark world. Let us not take this gathering for granted. Let us shine the joy & love of being in Christ amidst all our diversity, difference and wonder. That is how God enables us to move forwards in mutual love. May we follow God's Spirit in truth and love.