

May the words of my mouth  
And the meditations of each heart  
Be acceptable to you O Lord,  
Our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

In the Gospel lesson we just heard,  
Jesus says that the disciples are *from* the world  
And *in* the world,  
But do not *belong to* the world.  
He prays that they not be taken *out of* the world,  
But that they be *sent, into* the world.

There are a lot of prepositions to work through, here.

When I was learning how to speak Spanish  
And later, when I became an English as a Second Language teacher,  
I learned that these words of position and relationship can be quite difficult.  
One of the tools I used as a teacher was called Preppy, the Prepositional Squirrel.  
My students each made a puppet of a squirrel and a tree  
and used them to practice prepositions and their meanings.

It helped a lot to actually act out the prepositions.

In fact, the prepositions from our Gospel today  
Would have been a great excuse to break out my old squirrel puppet.

OK, I can't resist.

Here's Preppy the Prepositional squirrel.

And here's the world.

Preppy can be in the world,

Preppy can be taken out of the world, Preppy can be sent into the world.

But how should I show Preppy is from the world?

Preppy does not belong to the world?

That's a little more difficult to demonstrate.

What *does* Jesus mean, here?

What is Jesus saying when he says that the disciples are from the world,

But don't belong to the world?

When he prays that God send them out into

the world they don't belong to?

Unfortunately, the puppet can't give us anymore help.

But if we read Jesus' prayer in the context of his life, death and resurrection

We can start to understand what it means for us,

In our daily lives as disciples, that we do not belong to the world,

But we *are* sent out into it.

In his prayer for the disciples Jesus says,

"They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world."

In what ways did Jesus not belong to the world?

Even before he was born, Jesus was defying the world's expectations

When the angel appeared to Mary, a young, poor virgin

And told her she was going to be the mother of God

Everything humanity thought it knew about women, babies,

God and what the Messiah was going to be like got turned on its head.

The miracle of Jesus' birth does not belong to the world:

It is not the way of the world.

After his birth, Jesus continued to regularly defy expectations

Acting and working in ways that went against what is supposed to be.

Jesus ate, talked and made friends with people who the world hated:

Tax collectors, prostitutes, collaborators, foreigners and other outcasts.

Jesus healed people not only of their physical ailments, but also of their sin,

Saying, "You are forgiven."

If Jesus had belonged to the world, he wouldn't have done that.

The miracles and teachings of Jesus' life do not belong to the world.

Most importantly, we confess that Jesus was crucified, died, rose again

And ascended into heaven.

Nothing about that makes any sense, if we go by the world's understanding.

That God would be willing to die for us

Is the greatest contradiction of human understanding

Of what God is supposed to be like.

The world says God isn't *supposed to* die.

In a similar way the resurrection is the greatest reversal

of the way things are supposed to work.

The world says that people who are dead aren't supposed to live again.

The miracle of Jesus' death and resurrection does not belong to the world.

So what does that mean for us?

Because we are children of God and disciples of Jesus,

We don't belong to the world, either.

We belong to the miracles of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection.

We belong to the world-turned-upside down that Jesus created

By being born to Mary, by caring for the poor and the outcasts,  
And by dying on the cross.

In the book we've been reading for evening Bible Study,

Timothy Keller describes how Jesus' death on the cross creates a "counterculture."

A group of people who do not live by the world's values or expectations.

In *The Reason for God*, Keller writes this:

"Christ creates a whole new order of life. Those who are shaped by the great reversal of the cross no longer need self-justification through money, status, career, or pride of race and class. So the cross creates a counterculture in which money and power cease to control us and are used in life-giving and community building rather than destructive ways."

Because of the way Jesus Christ turns the world and its expectations upside down,  
Being Christ's disciple means you do not belong to the world.

So what do we do?

Jesus seems to recognize that one possible reaction his disciples might have is this:

"Hey ... we don't belong here ... get us out of this crazy world!"

Jesus does NOT respond like this: "You're right.

Separate yourself much as you can from the rest of humanity  
and wait for me to come get you."

Instead of encouraging his disciples to separate themselves and shun the world

Jesus prays this:

"Holy Father, as you have sent me into the world,  
so I have sent them into the world."

What are we sent out to do?

The same things Jesus did in his life that went against the way of the world:

Heal the sick in body and spirit,

Forgive each other and proclaim the forgiveness of sins through Jesus,

Eat with outcasts

Never consider ourselves above or better than any person or group

Seek friendship with and honor those that the world has rejected.

This prayer that is our Gospel reading

Comes right before Jesus is betrayed,

In his last moments with the disciples before his crucifixion.

It is full of tenderness and care,

Assuring the disciples, and us

That even after Jesus leaves the world,

We will not be alone,

God is sending the Spirit to accompany and empower us.

We will never be abandoned by God.

But in the midst of this loving reassurance,

This prayer also serves as a challenge

For the first disciples

And for all disciples today:

You *don't* belong to the world

You've been sent out into the world to change it

To make this world look more like heaven

To turn the ways and expectations of the world upside down

By following the example of Jesus.

You have already been set aside for this mission of service.  
You were chosen for it much the way Matthias was chosen to be a disciple,  
Not because you're good enough, not because of your skills or talents  
But because God wanted you to have this gift and this responsibility.  
So don't hold back, thinking you'll go out into the world when you're good enough  
When you're pure enough, strong enough, humble enough or ready.  
You already do not belong to the world; you've already been chosen.  
God has sent and is sending you out into the world every day,  
Working through you to bring the kingdom of heaven here, to earth.  
Let this prayer be a reminder for us as we leave this place,  
As we hear the words, "Go in peace, serve the Lord!":  
Like Jesus, we do not belong to the world.  
By Jesus, we have been equipped, empowered, and sent out  
Into the world  
To make a difference.  
Amen.