

LENT DEVOTIONAL



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Rooted in the Reformed tradition, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is committed to the formation of women and men for theologically reflective ministry and to scholarship in service to the global Church of Jesus Christ.

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Miller Summer Youth Institute

Metro-Urban Institute

World Mission Initiative

Zeitah Excavations

FACULTY

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EVENTS

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LENT DEVOTIONAL FEBRUARY 28, 2020

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 17:9-19

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 you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, 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. 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.

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Sue Sterling Montgomery ’77, Pastoral Ministry (1998)

John’s Gospel passage could be called a conundrum of words going ’round and around. They sound a lot like the 1930s song “The Music Goes Round and Round,” recorded by Tommy Dorsey:

I blow through here,
The music goes ’round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the first valve down,
The Music goes down and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the other valve down,
The music goes ’round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.

Jesus’ prayer seems a lot like air going ’round and around in a trumpet and coming out as sounds—sounds that are confusing: no longer in the world/in the world, hated by the world/do not belong to the world, not out of the world/no longer in the world, into the world—what?

To understand Jesus’ prayer we have to go back in time and understand how two opposite views of life guided ancient thinking. Greek philosophy saw the world as divided into two realms: the earthly and the spiritual. This view led to a major understanding of Christianity that still haunts us today—the belief that Christianity is about life not in this world but in the next world. Jesus brings these dual and conflicting images into his prayer. He knows the people listening to him are struggling to understand, just as we are, these dualities as well as the more troubling concepts of heaven and hell. This way of thinking has a long history that isn’t going to go away.

But Jesus gives us another way to view our complicated and spinning world. He was nurtured in the Judaic understandings of life and creation: the world—heaven and earth—is one holy place created by God. God is in the world, and holiness in life is lived in the world. Nowhere do we see this view more clearly than in the words of the Lord’s Prayer for God’s kingdom to come “on earth as it is in heaven.”

As the music goes ’round and around in our lives, where is it coming out—in love, or in Law? In grace and forgiveness, or in fear and judgment? Is the song we are singing in the world and affirming of life? Or is it a song of separation? May the music of our hearts go ’round and around—and come out with Jesus’ glorious and jubilant words of grace, faith, and promise.

PRAYER

Most gracious and loving God, on the night of Jesus’ birth his cry burst into song, which changed history. As he grew, his teachings became life-changing songs of love. When he was tried, crucified, and died, the world thought his song was silenced. His resurrection brought forth a glorious song of unending love. Help us never to forget that, if Christ’s song is to continue, we must do the singing. May we sing a jubilant song of faith, hope, love, and justice “on earth as it is in heaven.” In Christ we pray, amen.

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