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First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 20, 2012

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 1
New Testament Lesson: John 17:11-21

While Yuri and I were driving home from St. Louis a couple of weeks ago, our transmission gave out just east of Columbia about five miles from the freeway off ramp. *And yet*, we were able to drive on the berm and eventually pulled into a trucking company¹, which was open on a Saturday. Now they don't work on cars, *and yet* the owner knew of two repair shops nearby. He couldn't find their phone numbers, and yet he was more than willing to drive us over to both shops). As it turned out, they were both closed, and we were stuck. *And yet* we had coverage for towing under Triple-A, which got us a 100-mile ride in tow truck all the way to Grain Valley. (Actually, it was 114 miles and yet the driver waved the \$42 overage charge; nice guy and a surprisingly pleasant ride.) But, the Grain Valley shop could not fix our car, *and yet* the shop owner topped off our tranny fluid and pointed us to a nearby Aamco.² (He had spent over an hour digging around under the car and yet he didn't charge us a thing not even for the fluid.) Of course, the Aamco wasn't open for business on Saturday, *and yet* the owner was there hosting an oil-change ministry for low-income women. Long story short, we got a new transmission and everything's fine. And throughout the ordeal, I couldn't help but believe there was something more than our Triple-A protection in play. I think Yuri will agree that we experienced some Triple-G protection. We both felt we were meeting "angle" after "angle," sent directly from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit –better than Triple-A; it's Triple-G to the rescue. In our New Testament Lesson, Jesus prays for God's protection over his disciples. He had just laid out the future for them in earlier passages – foretelling of his being betrayed, put to death, separated from them prior to his resurrection, *and* that the world would hate them because of their belief in Jesus Christ. He prays, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." Protect them, in other words, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – send them, O God, Triple-G protection, "so that," says Jesus, "**they may be one.**" Jesus prays that God will protect us from any divisiveness, any difference of opinion, *and* any differences of fact, be they race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, income, disability – protected from all that might divide us so that we "may be one, as (God and Jesus) are one." And then he speaks of the ultimate division – the difference between what's referred to in John as "the world" and what Jesus knows to be unity in God. He says "... You, Father, are in me and I am in you; may they also be in us." "I have given them your word," says Jesus, "and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, "Jesus prays" but I ask you to protect them" OK, what's Jesus talking about here? Who among us is he talking about needing protection, and who among us does not belong to the world; who needs protection from the world, and why; what is meant by "the world"? We live in a world that is opposed to God's will and contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ. Left to it's own devices, the world stands apart from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And thus, when we let ourselves get

¹ Columbia Freightliner, Columbia, MO, Bob Burch, proprietor, <http://www.columbiafreightliner.com/>.

² Aamco Transmission of Blue Springs, _____, proprietor, <http://www.thecarcare.com/>.

overwhelmed, tempted, consumed by day-to-day stuff we are at the mercy of a world opposed to God's will, a world where: (Quote) "It depends on your definition of asleep." That's what John Hogan of Illinois' largest power company³ said.

Responding to charges by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that two Dresden Nuclear Power Plant operators were sleeping on the job, Hogan said, "They were not stretched out. They had their eyes closed. They were seated at their desks in a nodding position." So you see, "It depends on your definition of asleep."

We are at the mercy of a world opposed to God's will, a world where: Former New York City mayor David Dinkins answered allegations that he failed to pay his taxes by saying, "I haven't committed a crime. What I did was fail to comply with the law." We are at the mercy of a world opposed to God's will, a world where: A six-term congressman named Joe Early⁴ said at a press conference on the House Bank Scandal,⁵ (quote) "They gave me a book of checks. They didn't ask for deposits."

We are at the mercy of a world opposed to God's will, a world where: We chuckle at such deceptions; the bending of the truth by others, while each of us is guilty of the same thoughts and actions, but for the grace of God.

We are the ones Jesus prays for. Jesus asks God to protect *us* from a world that would otherwise lead us astray, betray us, subject us to sin *and* the resulting spiritual-if-not-physical death that sin causes – when we ignore God's word, turn away from Jesus Christ, fail to recognize and take hold of the power of the Holy Spirit, particularly in times of trouble and temptation.

We live in a world where we are constantly in danger of letting our Triple-G protection expire at just the wrong time; and that's never a good thing. Jesus wants us to keep our Triple-G account active. How you ask? I'm glad you asked that? And I bet you know the answer, too. How do we keep our Triple-G account active – how do we **stay connected to and protected by Triple-G God?** Raise your hand, shout it out.

(Congregation gives examples such as participating in worship, attending Sunday school, serving in the community, reading and studying the Bible, praying, visiting those in need, raising families and caring for loved ones, doing an honest days work, staying off drugs and alcohol – abuse, controlling our anger, apologizing directly to the injured party when we've done something wrong, etc., etc.) That's right, all of those actions and behaviors help to ensure our protection from sin and temptation. They give us the ability to turn back from that which we know is wrong. This is what Jesus is talking about when he prays to God, saying, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." To be sanctified is to be made holy – to realize that in a very real sense we, as followers of Christ, *do not* belong to the world; we belong to God. To be sanctified, to be made holy is to draw so close to God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit that it is no longer our thoughts or actions that rule the day, but rather God. It is no longer deception or the bending of the truth that we cling to for survival even amid a hostile world, but rather it is the word of God – the truth of God – alive in our hearts and in our world. "You have sent me into the world," says Jesus, "so I have sent them into the world." But if the world is so dangerous and difficult to navigate, why would Jesus send us out into the world – even with Triple-G protection? Standing among his disciples, Jesus says, "I ask (this) not only on behalf of these (people here now), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through *their* word, that they may all be one." Jesus' prayer was not just for those gathered around him that day, and not just for us here today who are striving to live into that prayer; to be one with

³ Commonwealth Edison, <https://www.comed.com/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁴ D-Mass., from 1975 to 1993.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_banking_scandal.

God, and thus, one with one another 'Jesus' prayer was also for those who would believe in Jesus Christ through the words of the apostles, as handed down to us so that we might speak Christ into the lives of others – through our words and actions and in opposition to anything contrary to the truth of God's word. Before lifting up this prayer to God Almighty, Jesus laid out the future for his disciples – the future for us. He foretold of his betrayal, his death, his ascension into Heaven, his resurrection, and the coming of his Spirit. And in this prayer that lives in us this day and in this place, Jesus asks God's protection on us all. He sends us out into the world, with the assurance that God is in us and we are in God, why? "... So that the world may believe," says Jesus, "that you (God) have sent me." That's why we enjoy God's protection – so that the world may know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's what makes it worth anything and everything we do to keep our Triple-G Plus account active – not for our sake alone, but **for the sake of the world**. Jesus sends us into the world under God's protection plan so that his spirit is active in the world through us, not only today, but tomorrow and the day after; not only in this place, but the spirit of Jesus Christ alive on the streets of Independence, traveling the highways of the Metro Area, and taking root throughout the lands and among the peoples of all the earth. And all it takes to make this possible, to save the world from itself – aside from God's work already done in Jesus Christ – all it takes is for us to keep our God account active.

As we prepare to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost next Sunday, and to enter into the season of Ordinary Time in the weeks that follow, what things might we do to keep our Triple-G Plus account active? What could you be doing – what could I be doing – to ensure that we have the protection of – that we carry the message of – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, whose Spirit searches all things and whose love bears all things, we thank you for creating the world, for calling it good, and for guiding us through it. We long to draw near to you in sincerity, Lord, but our falsehood often catches us by surprise. Enable us to lay aside our masks and disguises and to deal with the weakness and selfishness that prevent us from serving you and others. We see the unity of the Trinity, O God, and we desire to live in that same unity. Draw our hearts together, even as we recognize and honor our individuality. Save us from the hopelessness and futility of living life on our own. You have given us each other for love, support and community. Help us to embrace the beautiful experience of living in community, living for each other and for you, rather than living for ourselves. And let us begin living for the sake others – for those who are injured, sick, or in poverty, those who are depressed or otherwise carry a heavy burden – let us give of ourselves for them now as we take a moment for silent prayer.

O Lord, we believe that you want to do great things through your church. Unite us that we may together join you in your work, even as we join in the prayer that you taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

