

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**May 17, 2026**  
**Acts 1:6-14; John 17:1-11**

**"In But Not Of the World"**

A number of years ago, Ellie and I went to France. We had a great time in France, enjoying the sights and the food, the history and the food, the culture and the food, the wine and the food.... Well, you get the idea.

Before leaving for France, Ellie and I determined that we were not going to be the typical "ugly American" kind of tourist - you know the type that stand out like a sore thumb. We were going to blend in with the French people, become one of them for three weeks. We bought an interactive CD to teach ourselves French. We studied the guide books to become familiar with all their customs. Ellie even began to read romance novels set in France.

There was nothing we wouldn't do to try to conform to the French culture. And actually, we got to where we could say "bonjour," "comment allez vous," and "bon soire" like a native of France. We learned early on in a bakery that you order one of something by holding up your thumb rather than your forefinger, like we do in this country. So, we imitated that. We learned to dine late and eat leisurely meals. We learned not to use our fingers when eating anything. We learned how to stay out of the way of French drivers. We learned how to read French road signs and directions.

But do you know what? No matter how much we learned about the French, no matter how much we imitated them, no matter how hard we tried to blend in, we still weren't French. We really wanted to assimilate into their culture, but we just couldn't do it because we were foreigners in a foreign land. We spoke a different language. We had different customs. We ate differently. We drove differently. No matter how much alike we thought we were, we were just different from the French. No matter how much *in* their culture we were, we were not *of* their culture.

On the last night of his earthly life, Jesus prayed a prayer which John recorded in chapter seventeen. In this prayer, Jesus drew attention to the difference between being *in* the world and *of* the world. In verse eleven he prays, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world." In verse fourteen he prays, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I

am of the world.” He continues the thought in verse fifteen, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” Following up in verse sixteen, Jesus prays, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” And finally, in verse eighteen Jesus prays, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

Jesus recognized early on what we only now and then acknowledge - as followers of Jesus Christ, we are foreigners in a foreign land. When we're in church we see, hear, taste, touch and smell things which are different from what we experience in the world. In here we sing, “Come, Christians, Join to Sing,” and out there neighbor is divided against neighbor. In here we learn about true love and out there people confuse lust with love. In here we learn that we are the salt of the earth and out there people pepper their speech with profanity. In here we preach peace and out there we are confronted by war. In here we break bread to nourish our spirits and out there spirits are broken by the lack of nourishment.

Do you ever feel like you are a stranger in a strange land? Do you ever feel that, as a Christian, you speak a different language from the world? Do you ever feel that your Christian values are in direct conflict with what the world values? Do you ever feel that the world is pulling you in a direction you don't want to go? Well, good!

That's what it means to be in but not of the world. In the same way that I felt out of place in France, because France was not our home, we are going to feel out of place in the world because the world really is not our home. Our home is with Jesus Christ. Even though we live in the world, we are no longer of the same substance as the world. We are like oil on water. The two co-exist, but will always be separate.

Thus, feeling at odds with the world and what we confront out there is actually a good thing - it means that we are taking our citizenship in the kingdom of God seriously. When we should worry is if everything that happens out there seems very normal and doesn't upset us because that means we are becoming more of the world.

Jesus knows that living in the world and not becoming of the world is our greatest challenge. That is his diagnosis of our condition. When I go to the doctor with a medical problem I want a diagnosis. I want the doctor to tell me what is causing the symptoms. But a diagnosis alone is not enough. I need the doctor to prescribe a treatment or medicine to ease or erase my symptoms.

Fortunately for us, Jesus doesn't stop with the diagnosis. He also offers a treatment - prayer. Jesus himself prays for us. He says so in His prayer. He prays for us to have the strength and courage we need to live *in* but not be *of* the world. He doesn't pray for us to be removed from the world. Indeed, Jesus engaged the world and all of its

problems with His ministry of healing and reconciliation. He expects us to do likewise - to be salt and light for the world. And he equips us for living in the world with His prayers for us.

Through his ministry, Jesus demonstrated how to be in but not of the world. And one thing more. Jesus wants us to be FOR the world. Everything Jesus did showed very clearly that he was FOR the world. He was FOR the downtrodden. He was FOR the broken hearted. He was FOR the incarcerated. He was FOR those the system ignored. And that is what Christ expects of us, as well.

Now, I don't know where you will go after this worship service. I don't know all the challenges you will face in your life in the world today or tomorrow. But I do know this: wherever you go from this sweet hour of worship, Jesus prays for you. Jesus prays that the world will not overcome the light of the gospel in your life and that your light will shine brightly in and for the world. Jesus prays fervently for you to have the courage to conquer whatever obstacles the world puts in your path. Jesus prays that you will have all the strength you need to be *in*, not *of*, and *for* the world.

We are called to be part of the "in-crowd," but not to be part of the "of crowd." And more than that, we are expected to be FOR the world: calling out the injustices, the violence, the self-centeredness, the cruelty, the discrimination, the intolerance and the hatred of the world. That's what it means to be in but not of the world because we are IN Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**