

John 17:6-19
May 16, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, did anyone get in on the sour dough band wagon during the pandemic?

I was actually ahead of the curve.

When I was in Alaska in Sept. of 2019, I bought some dried starter, which I started in February of 2020 just for kicks.

We were told that sour dough is a big deal in Alaska because of the Klondike Gold Rush that hit in 1896. Prospectors brought sour dough starter with them to Alaska so they could make fresh bread in camp while on their way to making their fortune.

The trek from Skagway in Alaska to the Yukon Territory in Canada, where the gold was, was a grueling journey. Because it was so difficult, the Canadian government demanded that each person who started the trek take a literal ton of supplies with them. They were not let into Canada without them. Part of their supplies included the sour dough starter.

The story we were told is that sour dough starter was so precious to the prospectors that they would sleep with it in their sleeping bags. They would do all they could to keep the sour dough starter alive so they could have fresh bread to eat on their journey and at camp once they got to the gold fields.

Now if you have ever made sour dough, you know that you use part of the starter for the bread you are going to make, and you save some of it as the starter for future batches. You also need to feed the bit you've saved as starter in order to replenish what you have taken out of it. It's a living organism after all and it needs to be fed so that it can stay alive and more bread can be made.

So, the way I would go about it was once I got the starter going I would let it sit until it got bubbly and had some liquid on top. That's when it was sour.

I would then take one cup out of the starter to use for my loaf of bread, and then I would feed the rest of the starter with 1 cup of flour and add a cup of water, then it would go back into the fridge for future use.

I never used all of the starter. I set some of it apart, because it had a different job to do. One cup of the starter was used for bread and the rest was set apart for making more bread.

The word sanctify means to be set apart. With my sour dough starter, we could say that I sanctified part of it. I used part of it in a special way, different from the rest of it.

Sanctified is to be set apart, and this goes back to the Jewish Temple. Certain things were set apart for special use in the Temple, for the worship of God.

You could have a few bowls that all look alike, but the one you designated for use in worship was set aside for that special purpose and was kept clean so that it could be used in worship. It was set aside, or sanctified.

If you are like my mother, you also have things that have been sanctified, or set apart. Like the special fancy linens, china, and goblets. They are not used for every day eating, they are set aside, or sanctified, for special occasions – for fine dining.

At church, the communion ware is sanctified. It is set apart for that special use. No one is drinking coffee out of the communion chalice. No one is doing that, right? Right, because the chalice is sanctified.

Sanctified is to be set apart for a special use. It's not that the things are necessarily different, they've just been designated as having a particular use.

So, if we take a look at the John reading for today, we see that Jesus says that he is sanctified, set apart for a special purpose, death and resurrection, and he is also sanctifying his followers, setting them apart for a special purpose as well, to continue his ministry after he ascends back into heaven.

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, the day we celebrated Jesus' physical return to heaven. Today is the last Sunday of Easter. And, next Sunday is Pentecost, the day we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit.

So, if you follow the story in present time, this Sunday of Easter is the in between time – in between Jesus' return to heaven and the Holy Spirit being sent to us. On this in between Sunday, we hear Jesus' prayer before he is crucified.

In a way, this Sunday is like the Saturday before Easter, Jesus is not physically with us. We are in between.

And there are two important things we need to know in the in between. #1 – Jesus is always protecting us no matter what. Nothing can really separate us from God. And #2 – we have been sanctified. We have been set apart just as Jesus was set apart. We have been sanctified so that we can continue Jesus’ work to bring all people the good news of God’s love for us.

Traditionally the first letter of John has been attributed to the author of the Gospel of John, John the brother of James, one of the sons of thunder, the beloved.

Most scholars today accept that John didn’t write the gospel of John himself, but it was written by his followers.

After Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, John went to Ephesus, in modern day Turkey, with mother Mary and started a church there. John is the only apostle to die of natural causes and he lived to a relatively old age.

Throughout his ministry, people would come from all over to talk with John about Jesus, and John always had a very simple message. What did Jesus say? Love. Love one another. That’s it. It’s not hard and John did not make it difficult for anyone. It’s simply about love. God loves us so we love one another.

The first letter of John was written to those who were worried about their salvation. They were worried that what they believed about Jesus wasn’t true, because Greek philosophers were saying Jesus was never really a human being.

In an act of love, John writes them words of comfort, “I write these thing to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

God’s words are always words of comfort and promise. God’s word is never a threat or punishment. God’s words are all about love, and those of us who follow Jesus share that good news in the world.

So, Jesus sets us apart, sanctifies us, to bring that good news to everyone we meet. It’s not that we are different, it’s just that as his followers of Christ we have a special call to do in the world. Protected by God’s love we are sent to share the good news of God’s unconditional love in the world.

For those who want to join us in that work, they also are sanctified and sent as well.

As John said over and over again on that hill in Ephesus, it's always only about love. Through Christ, God's love is known and that love can never be taken away from us, and so we have eternal life with the Father. Eternal. It's never ending. That's the good news. And that's not just what we believe, but it's also what we trust.

We trust God. We trust Jesus. We believe in the name of the Lord, because God is love and has displayed that love for us through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus was killed. He never hurt anyone. All he ever brings is healing. That was what he was set aside to do, and that is what we have been set aside to continue.

Just as Jesus was sanctified, so we are sanctified through him.

Every time we trace the mark of the cross of Christ on our foreheads and splash water on our faces, we remember that we have been baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, sanctified to bring healing and life to the world.

Jesus' joy is made complete in us when we love one another, when we continue his ministry.

Thanks be to God. Amen.