

## **“Worldly and Otherworldly”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 16, 2021 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

Please pray with me, “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen” (William Sloane Coffin).

Greetings, Earthlings. I come in peace...and to enjoy God’s peace together with you as a fellow earthling, which is a good name for what we are: Earth creatures, formed from the dust of the earth and pulled down by its gravity as it seeks to reclaim us from the moment of our birth, which it inevitably will. All of the days until then, we struggle to rise to our great potential as we are not only creatures of the earth’s dust, but beloved children of God, with the spark of the divine dwelling within us and empowering us to live as elevated, noble creatures.

And yet, so often, we choose the way of dirt over the way of the sky. The lower way of the world that so many of us earthlings travel is the path of selfishness and brokenness, of ceaseless taking from one another and of the earth rather than giving. This is the worldly way that so many tread, and it leads only to destruction.

We see the terrible effects of people living on this path all around us. Horrifying acts of violence lead to more violence, which lead to more violence. We witness now this heartbreaking cycle of violence causing distress and suffering to people all over the world: In Israel and Gaza, Myanmar, Yemen, and Afghanistan. We witness the worldly way of violence in our own nation and in too many of our own homes.

But we, dear friends, are called to travel a more blessed path, the path of love, which leads to life and peace. This is not the worldly path, but an otherworldly one; it is the way of the heavens.

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that he "does not belong to the world." Indeed, he was an alien to the worldly way. He demonstrated this time and again to his followers, as he did not take from them, but gave to them—teaching, feeding, healing, and loving them in fullness by laying down his life for them.

Jesus goes on to tell the disciples that they too "do not belong to the world." They belong to God, and the world's ways are not to be their ways; rather, like Jesus, they are to live in the heavenly, blessed way of love. They are to be otherworldly.

In his Letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul describes the otherworldly way as the way of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 2:22-23). This way of living is possible because God's Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us to produce this good fruit.

We do so *in* the world to bless the world's people. Through our actions, we testify to God's life-changing grace and we offer a message of hope for a broken and hurting world. We are not to be of the world, but we are to be active in the world, uncloistered, that the world might become changed, made more heavenly, lovely, and blessed.

So let us testify. Let us testify through our word and our work that God's abundant, imperishable life is within us. Let us testify to the world that the seemingly endless cycles of violence and injustice can be ended if we enact new cycles of love and peace. The world needs our true testimony now.

It needs our true testimony, because there are a whole lot of untrue testimonies being offered. We are living in what many describe as a post-truth world, which means that we live in an age where truth still matters, but is at risk. Lee McIntyre, a fellow at Boston University and author of the book *Post-Truth*, describes post-truth as “a political subordination of reality,...a tactic that's used by authoritarians and their wannabes to control the flow of information so that they can then control the populace”

(<https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2020/02/27/part-iv-post-truth>). We are bombarded by fake news, “alternative facts,” and spin doctors trying to tell us that down is up and up is down. So much of the testimony of the world today is that what’s evil is good, and what’s good is evil.

But we have a good testimony that we offer, not to take from others and control them, as the untruth peddlers do, but to give life. Our truth is truly lovely, and it is meant to be shared. This is why tell stories of God’s grace and we sing songs about God’s love. It’s why we gather, week after week, to worship God and remind ourselves of the wonderful, life-giving message God gives us. It’s why we hear testimonies from one another about how God has been at work in our lives through this church. We will hear one such testimony shortly in our Stewardship Moment.

So let us be otherworldly, loving God and loving one another. Let us be engaged in the world, proclaiming boldly our message of love. And let us do all that we can to bring the heavenly way down to earth, where we dwell. As we do so, may we be blessed by God and be a blessing to the world. Amen.