

TEXT: John 17:6-19

TOPIC: Jesus prays for God's protection of his disciples and all who follow his way after them.

SUBJECT: Recognizing who we are as followers means learning to be a little weird.

TITLE: Bridging God-sized Dreams

One of the things my dad and I adored about Mom was how she'd accidentally twist words to give certain phrases different meaning. We used to tease her about that.

For instance, one time when we were traveling, we got stopped by road construction and Mom said "oh look ... they're filling the holes with cracks." On another occasion she took the phrase bridging the gap and reversed it to gapping the bridge. When I think of that, it feels like something of a Wiley Coyote and Roadrunner cartoon where the Coyote runs along and finds the gap only to fall hundreds of yards down to the valley below.

John's gospel is loaded with examples of bridging gaps, and as my New Testament professor used to remind us when I was in seminary, "If it's repeated, it must be important." Say that with me: *If it's repeated, it must be important.* That John's gospel repeatedly bridges gaps, we are given a model for how to live into God-sized dreams. Like each of the gospel writers, John wants us to not only learn about this new life, but also live into it, so we can live into the God-sized dreams God has for us that shifts our mission from ourselves to our mission field. Before we get too far into that, let's pray.

PRAYER

To best understand what John is doing, I think it's important to pay attention to the pronouns he uses in verse 20, where Jesus says, "those believing in me through their word." The word "those" implies Jesus' disciples while the word "their" can mean both the disciples as well as those who discover the significance of what Jesus' death and resurrection means to their lives. The word "those", however, also implies all people for all time.

While Jesus' talk with God just before his arrest is somewhat confusing, it is also beautiful not only because Jesus is explaining his dependence on God, he is also expressing the dependence all people should have as well. That means Jesus is not only praying for first century followers, but also the church today. So just think how interesting it would be to ponder the significance of what the church would look like if it was more like the church Jesus was praying for. Think of the God-sized dreams the church would accomplish today if the church lived into its calling to be the community Jesus is praying for. Just think what the church would be like if people let the Holy Spirit sanctify us today in the way Jesus prayed. The first century church was counter-cultural. If the church was as counter-cultural today as it was in the first century, we might even call it weird, and weird isn't just good – it's really good!

So, what did the first-century church look like?

John gives us a few clues, and the clues bridge the gaps between what was and what needs to be.

First, when the Word becomes flesh, Jesus becomes the one who bridges the gap between the world and God. As a writer, John bridges gaps when Andrew brings Peter to Jesus, and Philip invites Nathaniel to meet Jesus. The entire gospel is written, so readers may realize that coming to belief in Jesus will bring healing and life to us in Jesus' name. So, essentially, the community that forms around Jesus has its own uniqueness and maybe even its own weirdness but it was never meant to be a weirdness that's kept to itself; it's a weirdness followers are called to share. To achieve God-sized dreams, it takes a little bit of weirdness.

Think about that. Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit in Mark and Luke. Jesus heals a woman caught in adultery in John. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus heals the sick in

the first three gospels. Jesus heals the centurion's servant in Matthew and Luke. Jesus heals a paralytic. Jesus gives sight to the blind. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Jesus heals a woman who touched his robe.

Since there are 42 examples of healings or miracles Jesus performed, I could go on and on but I think that would be overkill; what's important is the weirdness attached to God-sized dreams, and the weirdness attached to being a church that is a source of healing and weirdness in our world because we relentlessly pursue God-sized dreams. When the church isn't a source of healing, it can be every bit like the Pharisees Jesus struggled with. Frankly, it's one of the reasons I applaud the actions taken at a General Conference this year. Those actions mean we are part of a denomination that has returned to believing in some God-sized dreams, however weird some might consider them to be, with a willingness to take some God-sized risks to fulfill the dreams. I believe they are truly risks that curve toward justice.

When churches dream the God-sized dreams God dreams for them, they bridge gaps between death to resurrection. God-sized dreams have churches live into what distinguishes us, as a church family, from the community. Living into God-sized dreams means no longer separating ourselves from others because Jesus didn't separate himself from anyone: he just lived into his holiness as he affirmed the holiness in everyone around him.

It all points to being sanctified. Do you know what another phrase for sanctified is? Set apart. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are set apart to serve God's will, to love and nurture the presence of God in you, and to always look for the presence of God in others. You are set apart to do what Jesus did. You are set apart to intentionally be a little bit weird because you make a point of associating with people who are invisible, broken, addicted, chained, jailed, lonely,

hungry and thirsty, and naked. You are a little bit weird because you choose to hang out with the outcasts society chooses not to see because you are willing to risk being called a glutton and a drunkard. You are a little bit weird when living out Jesus' presence in you and healing those you risk intentionally getting to know. Being a little bit weird also means loving.

Being a little weird means bridging the gap to discover others are every bit like you. Being a little weird means living in a world that might hate you because you choose to be set apart and a little bit weird. Being set apart does not mean you have superior moral values like the Pharisees told themselves they did, but being a little bit weird and set apart means your focus is on having relationships with people society often treats as moral inferiors (or sinners).

Being sanctified – set apart and a little bit weird – is what happens when followers grow up, and live into those God-sized dreams, embracing the culture Jesus nurtured rather than a culture that continually defines you, and always misses the mark.

To me, being sanctified and being a little weird is being who I am and doing what I do for love's sake. I know I am blessed whenever I intentionally find myself part of that community for whom Jesus served and that community of which Jesus prayed. May the same be true for every one of us.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.