

“The Anti-body of the Soul”

Psalm 1
John 17:6-19

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While babies are still in the mother's womb, their developing and vulnerable life is being prepared for the outside world. The mother's body transfers the much-needed antibodies that enable the child to eventually fight off the dangerous bacteria of the world. As the child is exposed to bacteria its body develops more and more anti-bodies increasing the strength of its immune system.

15 years ago, only a dozen products containing antibacterial agents were available, now more than 700 are available. We are bombarded with ads for cleansers, soaps, toothbrushes, dishwashing detergents, and hand lotions, all containing antibacterial agents. Likewise, we hear about "super bugs" and deadly viruses. Swine flu is the latest craze. Germs have become the buzzword for a danger people want to eliminate from their surroundings. We buy these products because we believe that they will keep our children and us safe. But studies are showing that overuse of anti-bacterial products as well as antibiotics decrease the strength of our immune systems...our ability to fight off bacteria.

The reason is that we have so insulated our bodies from bacteria that our bodies no longer cultivate the antibodies we so need to survive. So as a result we are more vulnerable to allergies, flue bugs, and the like.

The solution being recommended by health officials is called social distancing. We are encouraged to spend less time with people. Watch movies at home instead of the theatre. Eat at home instead of eating out. What's next? Stick to emailing rather than visiting our friends? Watching TV preachers instead of coming to church?

In our gospel passage this morning from John, Jesus prays for his fledgling disciples. He is concerned for their protection from the world. While he was with them he could protect them himself, but now that he is leaving them he needs a new way for them to be protected and at the same time do the mission that he is sending them out to do.

He says, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." He entrusted them to God.

Jesus sounds like a lot of parents I know who are about to wave goodbye to their little babies as they go off to college. It must be a hard thing. While they are at home we feel like we can protect them, guard them from the harshness and temptations of this world, but once they step out that door, they seem so vulnerable. We entrust them to God. O Lord, keep them safe.

But Jesus doesn't stop there in his prayer, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself,

so that they also may be sanctified in truth." The word sanctified has always been a tricky word. It goes back to an even trickier word: holy. Holy means to be set apart. A sanctuary is holy. It is set apart. It is not used for just any purpose. It is set apart for a special and specific purpose: the worship of God. It's not just a meeting place or a conference room. It's holy.

However, over time the word holy began to mean pure. Because if you set something apart you want to keep in nice and clean...pure. It's like the front bathroom that your mom always kept for company only. She had those nice towels that you were not to touch with your unholy hands. Comedian Ray Romano from the Show Everyone Loves Raymond said, "It was like my mother was saving it for some great event that had yet to happen. Like the Pope was going to visit or something."

The danger of this definition of Holy is that it becomes like anti-bacterial soap. We focus so much on cleanliness that we are reluctant to go out into the world for fear that we will catch something. All the time, our souls are becoming weakened by our insulation.

We have seen this religion throughout history...a compulsion to shut out the world. However, we have been placed in this world for a purpose. A holy purpose. Just as God sent Jesus into the world, Jesus sends his disciples into the world. But just like a mother's health transfers her health to her babies, Jesus arms our souls with some strong antibodies.

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Jesus did not avoid the world. He went right out into the heart of it. He was with people that no one else would touch: lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and gentiles. He wasn't concerned about catching the disease of the world because his soul was fortified with the truth, the word of God, the anti-body of the soul.

Jesus is the embodiment of truth. His words, his acts, his very breath, filled with truth. And as he walked through this world, the deceptions of the world could not penetrate him. With every new deception that came his way, his soul brought forth a new anti-body of truth to defeat it.

But had he never come into this world, deception, the bacteria of the world, would overcome it. But through Jesus, through the truth that he brought, deception would be uncovered and destroyed. And he passed on that truth to his disciples and through the years to us.

So as a church and individually as well we have been set apart, made holy, for a purpose, for God's purpose. First we must allow ourselves to steep in the truth. We do this individually through two daily exercise: prayer and study of the Bible.

Prayer is like being attached to God, like a baby is attached to the mother in the

womb. Through it, God nourishes us and transfers his Spirit to us that gives us all we need to face the world, the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The second is the study of the Bible. In many ways prayer and Bible study are the same thing. It also nourishes. The Spirit guides us in our reading. It fills us with the truth of God that enables us to counteract the deceptive bacteria of the world: pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust.

We also are steeped in the truth as we coming together here in this holy place for worship. We are fortified with prayer, scripture, preaching. We are cleansed in baptism. We are fed by the Supper. But also in our praise. As we praise God we open ourselves up to God's presence. And in fact, this is how we are sanctified, made holy, by experiencing God's presence.

But the danger is that now that we are all nice and clean feeling, we have a natural urge to stay this way. If we just stay nice and holy, free from bacteria, here in the sanctuary all will be well. It's like right after you take a shower. The last thing your want to do is go play football in the mud.

It's easy to go the way of Ray's Romano's mother and just think that if we keep everything nice here people will come from all over to visit our nice clean home. No. There out there. We are called to go to their homes. We are in the delivery business more than the dine-in business. We have a hungry neighborhood. Yes, let us wash our hands before we serve, but let us never be afraid to serve. God has given us the antibody, so let us not be anti-anybody.