**What does the “World” mean?**

**As Jesus prayed for his disciples, he used the word “world” many times throughout his prayer.  So many times is the word mentioned in Jesus’ prayer, the meaning of world becomes difficult to understand.  At one point Jesus said, “I am no longer in the world, but they (the disciples) are in the world.”  Yet a little later in his prayer, Jesus said of the disciples, “They do not belong in the world.”**

**The “world” in Greek had many meanings. We all recognized the literal translation of world in Greek because its translation is Cosmos, or the whole creation of God’s vast and beautiful universe. Another meaning of world in Greek is order, the world order, or order in the places we live.  Today I’m going to talk from the standpoint of these two meanings, because I believe they can help us understand what Jesus was saying as he prayed to his Father on behalf of his beloved disciples.**

**There is one way some people have thought of the word “world” I know is not accurate.  Perhaps you too have heard people say, “I am not of this world.”  This particular saying became a popular thing to say when I was in seminary by some of the students. They were going around saying to one another, “I am not of this world”; they were saying this in a particularly pious way.  I wondered to myself, “Well then what world are you from?” Was there some sort of spaceship lifting these students out of our world to another special world after class was over?**

**I was a lot older than most of the students; perhaps over time they would have grown out of believing they were not of this world. Still, I decided to say what I believed to be a strange statement in an Easter sermon I gave for my class in preaching.  I made the sermon joyful.  Yet I did seem to get my point across about believing any of us humans are not living in some other place or world. To me when people say, I am not of this world, they are indicating in some special way Jesus lifts them our of what to them must be just an ordinary world. The belief takes them away from the earth, our home. We’re born on our earth, we live on our earth, feel joy and pain on our earth. There are two unfortunate extremes people can move toward when they believe they’re not of this world. The first is if someone thinks they’re not of this world, it’s much easier to damage and even destroy parts of this glorious creation God has given to take care of and to love.  The world God gave us we are to nurture and is not something to ignore, or to take whatever someone might want from the earth with no thought of the damage being done to our only home, our earth.**

**Two quotations from the writings of Thomas Merton can help explain how much we lose when we begin to see ourselves as not part of this world God so affably gave to us. Merton wrote the following, “All of us have been graciously given a variety of spiritual directors in nature. The question is, are we paying attention to these directors?”  He also wrote, “I encourage you, and myself, to listen more carefully to what the Creator has to say to us through the Creation.  In doing so, may our hearts be more fully opened to the wonder and mystery of God.  Let us all take advantage of the spiritual directors God has given us.”**

**Native Americans said it this way. “Every step we take should be a prayer.”  If every step we take becomes a prayer, then we would become more aware of the spiritual directors who surround us on a daily basis. Sometimes a spiritual director can be as simple and overlooked as a bird singing in our back yard. Reminding us to stop and listen to the sounds of the world we belong in from the time we are born.  To stop and hear the beautiful sounds of the creatures of our world helps us to better recognize we are part of the creation God gave to us. They sing, bark, meow, howl and roar to us. Telling us we are part of one another, we need one another, we can learn from each other. We are connected in ways we might not even understand.**

**Another definition for “world” is order. When Jesus said in his prayer for his disciples, “They do not belong in the world.”, he was saying they belonged to a new order. After Jesus walked among us. there was a new order in the world.  His disciples were no longer Jews; they were followers of Jesus and would come to be known as Christians.  The disciples belonged in our world, just as we belong in our world, but they no longer had to be Jews.  It took some time for them to realize followers of Jesus didn’t also have to be Jewish. But they did finally understand people who were following Jesus were of a new order.**

**I always appreciated this vision Peter was given, which I’m sure helped him become aware there was a new order, and he needn’t adhere to the Jewish dietary requirements. This was Peter’s vision, “He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’” Peter’s vision help overtime to change the belief of early followers of Jesus that they didn’t also need to be Jewish. Peter’s vision remains very vivid to me, because of the direct words God spoke to Peter.**

**In our time and in our place, we know order can have many interpretations, especially the term “law and order.” If we can listen to deeply to the earth for spiritual direction, we can know the voice of God comes to us in many ways.  The earth and all the animals who live upon our earth can lead us back to the very basis of Christianity, love God, love one another.  When we live our lives in our world listening always to all surrounding us, we will know the order of the world was put in place by God.  When we love God and one another with all our hearts, minds, and souls, we can know we are on the journey God intended for us to follow. Amen**