

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**May 28, 2017**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

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**John 17:1-11**

*I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. (John 17:9 N.R.S.V.)*

## **Christian Life Is Not a Solo**

The Lone Ranger and his Native American side kick, Tonto were in a bad spot. They were surrounded by hundreds of savage warriors out for their blood. The Lone Ranger said, "Tonto, old friend, it looks like we are in for it this time."

Tonto replied, "What do you mean, 'we', paleface?"

In our lesson for today from John, Jesus is praying for his disciples. He is about to leave them and ascend into heaven. He is leaving them to finish the great that work that he began. He knows that there are going to be difficult times ahead for them, so he prays that they will be strengthened and helped.

The disciples of Jesus will not be Lone Rangers in their spiritual battles. They will always have the Holy Spirit to help them. That was great good news for them, as it is great good news for us! We as Christians will never face trouble or danger alone. The Christian life is never a solo affair!

Let's break this down a little bit. First I want you to notice that Jesus give thanks for the gift of the disciples. He considers them a precious gift from God. Now remember these are the same disciples that throughout the book of John never seem to "get it." They are forever stumbling about, asking silly questions, and missing the point of Jesus' teachings. Yet Jesus calls them a precious gift of God.

What applies to the first disciples also applies to us later disciples. Jesus considers us each a precious gift of God and prays for our success. Jesus wants us to succeed as disciples. He did not call you or me so that he could stand by and watch us fall on our face. Jesus prays for us. Jesus encourages us. Jesus prods us and wants us to succeed!

It is easy for us to get mired down in our spiritual lives. The challenges seem so great and we seem so small. Yet the good news is that no matter how many times we sin and fail. Jesus does not consider us failures. Jesus considers us precious gifts of God. And he continues to pray for us, encourage us, and help us.

The Christian life is not a solo. We need to hear this and take it to heart. We live in a society that values the rugged individual who will go it alone. But the Christian life is not about “Lone Rangers.”

Some people have the mistaken notion that God is like some supervisor who calls the workers and sends them out on individual missions. This notion comes from the limits of human beings. We can't be in more than one place at the same time. Yet, God has no such limits.

God never sends us off by ourselves. God leads the way and in fact, has already been at work around us long before we were ever aware of it. God does not call us to go off somewhere without him, rather God calls us to join him in what he is already doing.

I remember an older man who came in to see me one day in a previous church. His mother had just died. His father had died some years earlier. The man said to me, “John, I am an orphan now.”

I had never thought of it that way. It might seem a little silly for a 60-year-old man to talk about becoming an orphan. Yet, I could identify with what he said. My mother died when I was 25 years-old. Thankfully my father is still alive. However, I remember that lost and lonely feeling that was part of the grief when my mother died.

No matter how old we are when our parents die, there is a part of us that reacts like little children. “Where are you going?” “Can we just go with you?” “Who is going to take care of us now?”

Jesus was addressing just such a feeling when he made this promise in John 14:18. Jesus promises his disciples the help of the Holy Spirit. Then he says, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

That is a promise we need to hold on to. Everyone goes through ups and downs in their faith life. When everything is going well, it is easy to believe that God is with us. But there are other times when God seems very far away and our failures loom like impassable mountains. In those down times we remember, that God has promised, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

As you go through this coming week, I want you to notice how many times you surprise yourself. Someone will tempt you to do wrong and you will say, “No thanks that is not for me.” Another person may make a remark that is contrary to the way of Christ, and you will find a way to speak up. That is the work of the Holy Spirit within you, encouraging you, prodding you, giving you help and strength.

The Christian Life is not a solo. Not only did Christ promise to be with us, he also gave us each other. Jesus gathered the disciples together for prayer, teaching, and worship. When he sent them out, he sent them out two by two. He never sent them out alone.

We the members of the church are the body of Christ. Jesus gave us to each other that we might encourage, prod, and pray for one another. There are many in our society who think that they don't need the church. They are both wrong and selfish in their thinking.

Oh, I understand this church has its flaws and issues. Though this is a great church, it is not the great church that we might idealize. That's because we are made up of sinful, fragile, and broken people. We are not a sanctuary for saints, we are a hospital for sinners.

I know that many people have withdrawn from the church because the church has hurt them in some way. I hate that. It breaks my heart. At the same time, this does not change our calling. What it does do is give us a chance to practice forgiveness and kingdom living. For if we cannot forgive our fellow Christians, how are we ever to show forgiveness to the world?

We need the church and the church needs us. Together we can do so much more mission and ministry than we could ever imagine doing as individuals. To withdraw from the church is selfish in that it means the church is able to do less. To withdraw from the church is to say that the plans that God had for you in the church are not important.

Jesus declared that you are God's gift to him. You are not failures or losers. You are precious gifts that God has given to Jesus. The church is the body of Christ. You are individually members of his body, and your purpose is not just salvation, it is also service.

Let's think about the body metaphor a bit more. Suppose that you are the thumb on the body's left hand. Right now you are hurting because the right hand- the one holding the hammer while you helped hold the nail, has just hit you with the hammer. Stupid right hand - you are leaving and never coming back! In the body metaphor it makes no sense for the thumb to detach from the body and leave. Without the body, the thumb would die. Without the thumb the body is handicapped.

The Christian life is not a solo. First because the Holy Spirit is always with us. Second because together we are the body of Christ. And apart from Christ we can do nothing.

In closing, remember these words from Hebrews 10:23-25, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Amen.