

7th Sunday after Easter Year B St. Mary's and SSPP 13/5/18

St. John 17: 6-19

Lord we pray that your Spirit will be in the speaking and the listening.

There is a humorous story about the Ascension.

As Jesus ascends out of the disciples sight, he is escorted by two angels. One says, "Excuse me Lord, but could I ask a question - looking at that motley lot down there that you have entrusted your mission to -is there -is there a Plan B.?" Jesus replies:"there is no plan B. They are it".

They were it, we are it. We know that there are many other Christians throughout the world, throughout the country and here in Clevedon doing their bit to bring in God's kingdom, but God has called each of us here to at St. Mary's/ St. Peter and Paul's to do what only we can do to bring on God's kingdom, here in our lives, amongst our family and friends and contacts.

Over recent years it would seem that the Feast of the Ascension is no longer as major as it used to be. Some churches that used to keep it on the Thursday have transferred it to this Sunday. Sometimes you pick up a bit of a sense of embarrassment about the feast. My memory of visiting the Church of the Ascension in the Holy Land back in 1967 was of two foot prints in clay on the floor and in other churches you get it depicted by two feet coming through the ceiling. Just how to convey this sense of Jesus who has been in miraculous ways present with his disciples physically, after the Resurrection now being no longer with them, is difficult. He disappeared out of their sight.

Noel, as some of us heard on Thursday morning, pointed out how the Ascension marking Jesus' physical human presence going to be united with the Father points the way that it is also possible for us, who are human to be united with the Father in the heavenly state. He also pointed out that it was the wounded Christ who was united with the Father. None of us are perfect we are all in various ways

wounded, we all in our different ways have failed to live up to our God given potential, yet the mystery of Jesus Ascension points to God being willing to embrace us in our brokenness and fragility.

Our Gospel from St. John today for this Sunday between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is in many ways dense and packed and provides much food for study, discussion and prayer. One comment was that it was a complex passage set in the context of some dense Johannine theology . It is about Jesus commissioning his disciples to continue his mission after he is no longer with them. They are the first A team.

One of the main parts is about Jesus' prayer for his disciples. This passage comes in the Gospel before his betrayal and death, but was of course written in the light of the Resurrection and after the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for his disciples and for us his disciples today. At the heart of this prayer is Jesus love and concern for his disciples and his assurance that his Father loves them too. The passage uses frequently the verb to give. The verb has that sense of movement and flow, from one to another, between Jesus and his Father, a love which includes and flows through to the disciples then and now and back to the Father and Jesus.

Jesus prays for two things, for joy, “ that they may have my joy made complete in themselves” and “for protection from the evil one”. Happiness and Joy are often confused in our world. When asked what they want for themselves and their children people often reply “to be happy”. It is difficult to define but for me joy is a deeper emotion that has a quiet contentment about it. It is a gift that can sustain you even when things are difficult. A question for us is do we do what we can to nurture and recognise the gift of joy in our lives and in those of others?

Jesus prays that they, that we, will be protected from the evil one. We know there is much that is evil and negative in this world and the fellowship of the church is not immune from this. We in our own lives maybe not on the major scale, may not be adding to this, but

we do have to choose constantly in little ways of being either positive or negative, helping to build up and encourage each other in our life together or being someone who always tends to look on the down, negative, critical, tearing down side. Jesus calls us to be real and realistic but to be open to see the possibilities for life and growth, to encourage one another and to work for that. To choose life and to build each other up. We might not be able to do anything major in defeating the ills in our world and society but we can care and make a difference.

Jesus has shown to his followers what God his Father is like, someone who loves and cares for them. The God whose name was so holy that no Jew, other than the high priest on the day of atonement was able to utter it, that same God, who was remote and invisible has been brought to be close and intimate through Jesus to his followers. It is hard for us to imagine what a sea change this must have been for them.

Jesus thanks God for the disciples that he has given him, he didn't doubt that they would carry out the work they were called to as his followers. They were called to carry on Jesus work of proclaiming the kingdom. God has his dream his hopes for each of us, that we will fulfil our God given potential and be fully ourselves as we give ourselves to him and follow his will for us. We don't need special training or qualifications to be faithful followers of Jesus, we just need the will to act in whatever ways we can and the recognition that we need to pray for God's gift of grace to enable it to be real and active in our lives.

As we approach next Sunday Pentecost can we think of the gifts we might think we need to be better followers of Jesus, gifts that would help us in our relationship with God and also in our trying to respond to God's call to bring in the kingdom. Our Archbishops Justin and Sentamu have called for world wide prayer not only in our own Communion but it is united with other denominations around the world praying for the bringing in of God's kingdom. One of the practical aspects is getting each of us to pray for five people we know that they may come to faith.

Jesus calls us to be “in” the world, but not “of” it. Our values should not be those of the world, the “I am alright and blow everyone one else”. All that matters is that I get what I want attitude. How we stand up for Christian values in the world in which we live, is a question we need to frequently remind ourselves of in our “me first” world.

Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples. Being united doesn't mean that there won't be disagreements and different points of view, but it does mean being prepared to work together for the greater benefit of all. There will be different ideas and visions of how things might be but we need to share and work together for the good of our whole outreach here.

Jesus prays that they and we may be made holy, sanctified by the truth, his word is truth. What is it to be made holy but to be made whole.? God desires that each one of us grows into wholeness, grows into the fullness of who we are and who we are meant to be, our true best selves. The word also means to be different or to separate. It carries with it that sense of being “set apart for a special task”. It also means to equip people with the qualities of mind heart and character which are necessary for that task. We need God's grace and wisdom if we are going to fulfil the task to which he calls us.

We are called to be a community which has and shows God's love not only amongst ourselves but a love and care that flows out to others. We are it. We are the A team. We today together here are it. Not the whole of it - but we the followers of Jesus here, in this place are called to carry on his work of following his command to love one another and to proclaim the good news by our lives. We need to get on with that today and everyday. We pray that God will fill us with his grace as we worship him (in this Eucharist) and that his Holy Spirit will come and fill us anew this Pentecost that we may help and encourage one another in the task of bringing in God's kingdom today here and now. Amen