

Rev'd Jean's Sermon – Sunday 12th May 2024

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Readings:

Acts 1: 15-17 & 21-26

John 17: 6-19

Time marches on doesn't it! We feel sometimes we are not keeping up with how quickly it all goes. We have come to the last week of the Easter Season, the holiest part of the year. The focus of Easter is that we should be united with the Risen Lord Jesus, and importantly with each other in stronger and more united ways that the Gospel of love can be proclaimed in all the world. That has always been, and more to the point is the instruction for us in this day too, it is an urgent message.

We marked the Ascension here on Thursday and now we stand on a new part of the bridge, looking back as we must, but looking forward with Jesus to the next part of what his whole purpose has been. He has lived a human life and participated fully in what it all means to be incarnate to be flesh like us, to feel the emotions of life's journey, struggles, decisions to make, joy, and deep sad times, we could go on but it is time for the Risen Lord to move on. Jesus has been instructing and guiding and telling them that the Holy Spirit will be our promised guide and instructor.

When we sometimes search or look for an instruction manual to help us with a question we find the letters FAQs. Frequently asked questions. Yes, we want to do this don't we, we think of Thomas, who represents us in our doubts and questioning and yet falls to his knees in belief, Mary stood weeping outside the empty tomb and her encounter with who she thought was the gardener, but then recognized her beloved Lord.

“Sanctify them in the truth” is to make them holy by the truth. This is Jesus' prayer in the quoted passage. This line comes from Jesus' beautiful High Priestly Prayer in which he prays to the Father for his disciples and for all who will eventually become his disciples - and that includes you! And me. Jesus' prayer is not only effective as a prayer, but also as a lesson on holiness. How do we become holy? Simple. We allow the Word of the Father to consecrate us in truth. In other words, we allow God's holy Word to engage us, challenge us, change us, call us from sin, point us to Heaven and transform every aspect of our lives. God's Word is the truth, and we will become holy if we are transformed by this truth in every aspect of life.

Let us pause for a moment and take time to listen, to hear, to watch Jesus as he prays this beautiful prayer for himself and for all of us. It's a summing up of what's about to happen and a prayer for us and all believers.

He reports that he has completed the tasks assigned to him of making the Father known, he amplifies this in his report that he has completed the tasks of communicating the need for an establishing of a special relationship with God. This relationship is the hope for unity in the world and the unity that Jesus said was necessary for our human relationships one with another. This prayer is about what the father will do for the world continually through his risen son, Jesus Christ. It is a powerful intercession for all that shall be, it is a beautiful easy to understand blue print for our lives, it is a plea for how unity can be achieved by our love for each other, by our actions in an uncertain world, the temptations that we face sometimes to give up on mission, it is a real heart prayer from Jesus that we may withstand the challenges that will inevitably lie ahead it is a plea for all that will lie ahead, to strive for a unity that includes all. It isn't just an outward thing, a formal arrangement, but based on the very prayer we have listened to, a mirror image, nothing less, than the unity between the Father and the Son.

That the world may come to know and desire what a truly caring, loving community can look like, that goes across all barriers of race, custom, gender and class, the action of a creator God, “so that the world might believe”. The Archbishop of York has been spending time in New York this week with Bishops there, promoting with them all that Jesus prayed in this prayer that we might be one.

I have been on holiday in Egypt this week. I have had some amazing conversations with people, not least the one I had on the plane flying there. I was sitting next to a gentleman and his wife from Leicester. We shared parts of our life's journey. He asked me a powerful question “are you a Christian?”. My reply: yes. My question to him: are you a

Muslim? His answer: yes! He was a professional gentleman, an optical engineer, he told me how his parents had brought him to this country from Africa to live and his growing up here,

We shared our common desire for unity Peace and acceptance for all people and yes indeed “that we might all be one” – the same human desires. A wonderful time of conversation. Another amazing experience in Hurgadha in Egypt was to be there for their celebration of the Coptic Easter, an Easter Parade on the Monday the Bishop and clergy dancing, drums and pipes and balloons everywhere, and painted eggs, another powerful discovery of difference and how there is room for it all. This too is part of Jesus prayer that he is in the world.

It's exciting as well scary when we stop and think that this what God has chosen us to do, to be a visible manifestation of God's love through Jesus Christ for every individual, we have been called to proclaim the gospel in what we do and say to others. To do that we have been invited to abide and remain in the Fathers love and to let him remain and abide in us, that the promise of the gift of Pentecost will be ours to share with all who come to us, to let our Baptism work alongside us. To serve those whom God has entrusted to us and to his church.

The Ascension does not mean that Jesus is absent from the church but enforces that he is always with us and present in his church. Yes, we recognize that we are working our way through stressful and strange times, but this day as we yet again take the Lord into our hands, we take also the comfort in knowing that Jesus has prayed this prayer because he understands and cares what life is about, but more than ever to take comfort hearing this promise again. “I will be with you even to the end of ages”. So let us press on over the bridge as the disciples did and claim afresh the empowerment of God's love shown to us in the prayer Jesus has prayed on our behalf.