

**Sermon: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 / 1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11 / John 17:6-19: Sunday after Ascension
May 24th 2020**

In terms of the Easter Story coming of age, Thursday marked the Ascension of Jesus – hugely significant to what comes next – because as with God’s whole story of salvation – everything links – everything fits.

The Ascension has completed what had begun through the cross – forgiveness of all that had gone before – and the opportunity for new beginnings – the incoming of a new Spirit of hope. Just before he ascended Jesus gave instructions to his disciples. Let’s recap IMAGINE JESUS SPEAKING TO YOU WHEN HE SAYS: ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled ‘you are witnesses of these things – I am sending upon you what my Father promised – so stay here ... until you have been clothed with power from on high.’ AND THEN HE BLESSED THEM before he ‘withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.’ And the disciples worshipped him with great joy and continually in the temple blessing God.’

Two angels had appeared to the amazed disciples – and told them to go forth and proclaim the good news just as Jesus had instructed them – to not be afraid or sad – because he would send the Helper – to assist them on the way – the Holy Spirit is waiting in the wings for that glorious arrival at Pentecost...

So that sets the context for our readings today and for the journey towards Pentecost next week and the coming of the Helper – the Holy Spirit.

Today we continue to see that it all begins with Jesus making God known in the world and encouraging his disciples to carry the baton when he goes.

John’s seventeenth chapter is sometimes called the ‘high priestly prayer’, given in the upper room, and after which Jesus led the disciples across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane where he was arrested.

These words are not unlike last words offered by people all over when they are to leave loved ones – ‘last words’ play an important part in our lives don’t they? Especially last words spoken through final breaths – practical, profound, sometimes nonsensical – but very often loving..

This ‘last words’ prayer of Jesus we hear today speak of someone who cares hugely for those he is leaving behind – he might be divine but is entirely human as well.

In the past the disciples have asked Jesus to teach them how to pray but Jesus is now praying for them – for us... Almost like the ‘other Lord’s Prayer’

And Jesus is praying for the Church – the people who follow him - he is compassionate – almost gentle...

This might be called the high priestly prayer – but you can also see this as a high pastoral prayer. Again imagine Jesus praying for you – as he prays this prayer to his Father – because he is praying for you and for me...

I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ... Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. ...13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves

Jesus is praying for the protection – flourishing – for physical and spiritual wellbeing of that first group of disciples – the first church if you like – although they probably didn’t know it ...

And in the first letter of Peter – we hear him say – don’t expect that just because you live in faith there are no obstacles and tricky times – and don’t we know it today...

He says: ‘do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you’ (1 Peter 4.12). Do not waste your energy on being surprised, or on wondering how such a strange event has come about. Focus instead on what you need to do to respond well. When we suffer we share in Christ’s suffering as he did in ours in the first place and continues to do today when we lose our way of the path to peace and love.

But – we can hold on for the fulfilment of the promise that you will also share his joy, for the pattern that Christ presents is not of unlimited suffering for its own sake, but suffering leading to forgiveness and an overflow of life: death leading to resurrection. God has called us to his eternal glory in Christ. There will come a time to be glad and to shout with joy! (Roots)

Jesus is calling upon the power of God - not the world in its brokenness. But he is not setting up a 'them and us' scenario.... Remember - This is the same gospel that says 'God so loved the world' – it is God's beloved world and Jesus connects the love of God and the broken world and reconciles them THROUGH his disciples – through us...

He is saying to them and us now 'I am going but you are here - and are being sent out to be in the world the same as me I was in the world reaching out to the world - so if you love me then you love God, and if you love God then you love those in the world – no matter what....

And the sanctification he bestows – the making holy – is manifested by simply living in this truth of love – in the church and outside its walls

SO this is sending-out prayer is to help them – and us - to be able to live in the WORD in the WORLD and we go on to hear how the disciples endeavoured to go and do just that – practically and spiritually.

We here how they do that later on in Acts – they begin to regroup - to take a deep breath – put all the trauma behind them and go forth. They find a replacement for Judas – prayerfully and intentionally and then they listened – prayer slows us down as we wait – and then we are able to listen more clearly to what direction God is nudging.

We are being called to intentionally do pray intentionally as we replace the fragments of our with new and transformed ideas and ways – and redeemed older ways that will become embedded of the wisdom and experience of lockdown exile. And we are being called to pray intentionally this week as a global community during our Thy Kingdom Come wave of prayer

NOW – do you not get a sense of how God is speaking to us here – at a time as we prepare to venture out again - at this time of new beginnings – new energy – new hope – how he is taking all the goodness and love and hard work and preparation as a result of enforced exile from the world – and brought it all to this point in time – so that we can lay foundations of community and love that will bear fruit

Between ascension and Pentecost the disciples prayed continually to be empowered to live out the good news – and it is between Ascension and Pentecost – as we engage in the communal prayerlife of TKC

just like that first church community - pray continually and intentionally that the 'Thy Kingdom Come' experience be known in our own lives – our community and our world.

Remember - Jesus blessed the disciples at the time of his departure to heaven – and today he blesses you – and me as we live out our communal life in his name – so in the spirit of Jesus-joy, justice and love – let us pray – and pray – and pray – and pray..... Amen