

John 17:6-19: Sunday after Ascension - 2021

The Easter Story comes of age at the Ascension of Jesus – God’s whole story of salvation links – everything begins to fit into place..

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.

And I believe through the spiritual journey we are making at this time of easing from lockdown and stepping into the world – as individuals and as a church community, we are receiving our own instructions from Jesus about how best we might do that in his name – and that through praying and pondering with the intentions to do our best, Jesus will help and guide us through the Holy Spirit to find a way to help build deeper roots and connections as we help to build God’s kingdom of love in our place.

This is an important time for all of us as we seek to make sense of things and find our way – and living out our faith it is powerful to imagine the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples just before he left them because he is speaking them to us today as he has spoken to others in generations past. He says:

‘These are my words ..... ‘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.’

And he is clothing us with power from on high and blessing us that we might worship him with great joy and continually bless him in the temple – in our church community.

The readings today – of the Ascension and of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples – sets the scene for the journey towards Pentecost next week and the coming of the Helper – the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is 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 before he was arrested and speaks of someone who cares hugely for his friends.

Jesus wants his friends to be safe, to be in the world but not of it – and to know he is with them and that he has led by example – and if they follow him and stay connected, they will be connected to the power of God through him that will be given to them through the Holy Spirit – they are to watch and wait – we are to watch and wait - for Jesus.

And it is in the ascending – the going up - that Jesus is making way for that Holy Spirit to descend – to come down – to enter into the hearts of his followers so that they can impart that truth to others. In this way, the temple will be restored – God will not be in one place – but in a place where all can dwell and worship in – empowered by the Holy Spirit – the temple is the body of Jesus and Jesus is everywhere – without limits and boundaries and walls...

This compassionate pray that Jesus prays for his disciples – his church – then and now – is prayed in the knowing that he won’t be with them in person – and while they need to be lifting their hearts heavenward towards God’s grace shown through Jesus – their feet need to be on the ground – so in the power of the Spirit they can work to God’s glory in all that they do in the place they are called to do it – Grow where you are planted he is saying.... This priestly prayer is also pastoral – gentle and caring...

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 ...

He knows from experience how tough it will be sometimes to live out the commandment to love God and love one another as he loved us – he is praying that they be protected and guided

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 God's beloved world and Jesus connects the love of God and the broken world and reconciles them THROUGH his disciples – through us...

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.

And this is just where we are at in these post-lockdown times – I believe St Peter's is being guided and led – encouraged to deepen our prayer life – individually first so we can be empowered together as a community – to strengthen and build our church – that it might become sustainable and a spiritual hub for all in our parish who might be in need of a spiritual home – whatever that might mean for them.

But for us – that means being here as a witness of God's hospitality of welcome and love in Christ's name – finding ways that we can join in with God already present in the heart of this place – and have some fun along the way...

And these coming weeks, we are being encouraged to pray intentionally as we replace the fragments of our (lives) with new and transformed ideas and ways – that some of the old will weave themselves into the new – some things will change and evolve – but in the end all that we do will work towards proclaiming the Good News in a way that will help us to grow together and encourage one another and others to come and see and be nourished from the inside out so that we will be able to stand firm in a shaky world in trust and hope that we are held and will be guided through.

Please pray for the PCC as they meet this week – last week some joined other churches to ponder and plan for the coming months – to see what it might look like for us as a church and how we might be able to be a church that will empower ourselves and those who are yet to experience the gift of fellowship and faith that comes with being part of a church community.

God is speaking to us here – at a time as we prepare to venture out again - 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 our praying for five people we know who might be nourished by having the heart to explore how faith might work in their lives – hold the names on our cards close to our heart – tie the knots in our prayer bracelets as remember them with encouragement...

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

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