

Easter 7 – Sermon at St Aidan’s – 20th May 2012 -DT

Theme: ‘Jesus prays for his disciples’

Reading: John 17: 6-19

Introduction

Over these past few weeks we have been working our way through various of the long passages in John’s Gospel of Jesus sharing with the disciples about his mission.

Now we have the longest recorded prayer of Jesus which comes in three sections.

1. Jesus prays for himself in John 17:1-5
2. Jesus prays for his disciples in vss 6-19
3. Jesus prays for all believers in vss 20-24

The setting is just prior to his arrest which follows in the beginning of the next chapter in John 18.

In the Christian Year this reading is just prior to Pentecost Sunday and that is why I have today used the Acts 1:15-17 & 21-26 reading where Matthias is added to the disciples shortly before the Pentecost experience.

Also Jesus’ prayer is for all his disciples and we recognise Matthias now as part of that group which with Pentecost and beyond grows rapidly.

Getting into the passage

John 17 has been called the ‘high-priestly prayer.’ Many Biblical commentators emphasize that this prayer is a model Jesus is teaching the disciples in this transitional period of separation that is leading to the cross and resurrection as culmination of his earthly ministry. As with the Lord’s Prayer

Jesus is intentional in teaching how to pray to God and make intercession relevant. But this is also a ‘farewell prayer’. It conveys again this concern for the disciples and their mission in the world modelled in Jesus’ relationship to God. It picks up the teaching of the past few weeks of the Lectionary of Jesus the vine, the disciples/followers the branches and God as the gardener. Jesus is praying to God in this divine relational community, asking for God’s presence and guidance as the disciples, now commissioned as future apostles, are sent to the world to witness to God’s love and unity. The key element here is that the disciples are in the world under God’s protection.

Three aspects of the prayer

As I re-read the Gospel for today three verses in particular stood out and I wish to share just a little on each of these.

1. “I pray for them (the disciples) for those you have given me, for they are yours.” John 17:9

This highlights to me that we are called by God and we are his. Our faith is not our own but God's and we need to acknowledge that in all we do. We may have ideas and visions of what we would like but ultimately our ministry is God's not ours. Unfortunately so many people fail to see this and when others disagree with their thoughts they go off 'in a huff' and sometimes 'setup' their own faith group or simply go nowhere and let faith die. How sad!

I also see this section of the prayer as a prayer for unity and working together ecumenically whenever we have opportunity.

I have been blessed in two of my appointments to have had opportunity to work closely with other denominational groups.

In my Navy chaplaincy, on the larger bases there were three chaplains. Usually a Roman Catholic, an Anglican and Other Protestant Denomination were the composition. As Uniting I was in the latter group. I came to appreciate some aspects of the differing traditions but also the lovely Christian fellowship we shared together and some of the pastoral care for one another. One example of this pastoral care given to my family was when I was in the Gulf Deployment in 1991/92 my Catholic colleague in Western Australia took my family out for meals and showed great care for them in my absence which I really appreciated.

While in Frontier Services I had opportunity to share with Catholic and Anglican bishops about shared arrangements in remote Australia so that our people were mutually cared for spiritually and pastorally often by clergy not necessarily of our denomination. Differences remained but we saw each other as part of the body of Christ caring for its parts together, which was a delight.

Unity is to be encouraged and prayed for.

2. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." John 17:15

The call here is for the disciples to be 'in the world' but protected from the failings of the world or the distractions that can lead away from faith and may have an 'evil side' to that task or interest. This is not a physical protection but rather a spiritual protection. For our society today this is even more so than in Jesus' time. We have all sorts of things that lead us away from faith, some of which are very ordinary.

An example is the 'online gambling' now being advertised on our televisions. This is bringing gambling into the homes through computers along with illicit sexual sites and so much more. I am certainly not against technology but some aspects are quite insidious and we need to be careful not to be led astray. You may well say that our computer usage is limited due to our age but the younger generation lives on their i-phones and their computers and are open to a variety of temptations through modern technology.

We are called to pray for protection from the 'evil one' in whatever form that may take.

3. "As you sent me into the world I have sent them into the world." John 17: 17

Our mission is not simply to those who love God and are part of the community of faith. The mission of Christ, through his disciples is to the world. Not easy in our society where many do not seem to want to hear the word of God through Christ.

Yet this is part of our mission. It follows up the readings of the past two weeks of 'bearing fruit' for Christ as we faithfully follow his ways.

This 'bearing fruit' comes to us next Sunday with the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost which leads to the first large influx of believers.

But now we are called to: pray for those who are disciples

pray for unity for Christians
pray for protection from evil

pray for our mission in the world
So let us pray for these things. Amen.