

sermon 7th Sunday Easter Year A

Acts 1:12:14, 1 Peter 4.13-16, John 17:1-11

The Means of Grace and Hope of Glory.

Before I returned from my leave this last week I spent a morning in Hospital visiting a friend who is coming to the end of her life. I anointed her and celebrated communion with her at her bedside in a makeshift manner using the Ascension readings. She swore rather unfortunately at a nurse who wanted to change the drip. But she was at peace when I left. Of course I apologised to the staff for her drug and anxiety induced outburst. However It wasn't her fruity language that left me deep in thought as I went my way. More like Oliver Twist than the powerful politician and senator she had been – she had pleaded “i want more” after I had given her communion. I obliged she finished the lot and she glowed. It had been 6 months since her last communion and I'm sure it would be her last on this earth.

In the first reading today, after Jesus' Ascension, the apostles return to Jerusalem. They gather in an upper room with Mary and other women. It is not stated but **upper room** should tell us what they were doing – sharing communion. Communing with God in Christ is at the heart of our readings and of course is the purpose of every mass. To allow our Lord Jesus Christ to be present in the midst of us.

Everything we are and do should be brought to this place and everything we hope to be and do should flow from it. It is the focus and well-spring of the Christian way in its fullest expression. The Apostles devoted themselves to this prayer, this worship this pattern while waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to come. They will then return to it again and again throughout the breathless activities of the Acts of the apostles that we will read this coming season, for without it their ACTS will be just that – theirs and not God's - empty and rootless. The modern church not least ourselves should be mindful of this in our busy lives and lofty desires. Making time to dwell in the upper room is vital – vital means life giving.

It is of course a pattern this is not always easy, loved ones, colleagues, work and much else can often take priority. More dramatically and overtly challenging, Christians can be persecuted and ridiculed for making this communion their priority to shape the balance and rhythm of life – to ask that their acts be Gods acts. This is why our second reading in 1 Peter seeks to give us hope and fortitude when the practice of faith is hard. We are assured that Christians should find joy in their sufferings, as it aligns them with Christ's own suffering and ultimately leads to sharing in His glory. We are encouraged to live unashamedly for Christ, even if it results in persecution.

The prayer of Jesus in our Gospel reading is as we know part of the farewell discourses. These intense prayers and the remembrance of such prayer by John take place in the Upper Room before our Lord's self sacrifice on the cross. This is important for at least two reasons firstly because it shows the inseparable love between Father and Son and secondly because Jesus prays for us that we might be protected by being within that same love. It is a theme we will no doubt return to at Trinity - God is one in three persons creating, redeeming and sustaining – not just anything and everything - but you and me and wants us to be right there in the middle of that amazing love – whatever assails us in this life.

In all this we are reminded that even though Jesus after the Ascension is not with us in his human body, we are still connected to him and to each other in prayer and especially in the act of Eucharist. Jesus has Ascended but we are reminded in this gospel how Jesus prepares us to ascend. He does so by praying for us not just as individuals though he does but as his flock as his heirs. He prays for his disciples to be united, just as he and the Father are one. That is why church division – both between and within denominations is a scandal. It is why communion for the Christian is not a theological word for compromise but a place where there is restraint of opinion and personal taste for the sake of a unity that only God can offer.

Witnessing and evangelism are part of Christ's prayer for us too. But just as he has always pointed to Father so he desires us to die to self and live. This reflects that Old testament theme so often proclaimed by the Prophets – choose life. For us this is to witness to the world about Christ's mission and teachings not our own.

Patience and humble guidance are woven in prayer here too, for they are waiting for the Holy Spirit. Likewise we on this Sunday after Ascension Thursday should wait upon, and prepare to cooperate afresh with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost next Sunday. Waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment is a key feature of the activity of the Acts of the Apostles – why should it be different for us?

In every age this involves new beginnings, letting go of burdens, seeing things afresh, seeking forgiveness and healing. However this should be combined with a powerful confidence, which seems too thin in our age, a confidence that does not constantly apologise or conform to the world. For note well in the Gospel "**the hour has come**" not will come. In this Gospel the last words of Jesus on the cross will be IT IS FINISHED. The glory of the cross is present and fulfilled.

God's work in Christ is not something to be fulfilled in the future dependent on us – it is done. Jesus pray is that we be part of it. In the words of the Gospel *“eternal life is this: to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* Our calling is to live this and welcome others to live it too. With or without us this truth is eternal – we are both the purpose of this mission and powerless in its fulfilment.

As sacramental Christians we should understand that close relationship with God comes by grace not achievement, through the Word, through prayer and through communion. It is through this relationship that we can know the fullness of life that Jesus speaks of. We cannot welcome and encourage others to the same if we are not attentive and open to it ourselves. More is never enough until by grace we have finished where Christ has finished.

The Revd Fr. David Wylie RN

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