

Sermon Easter 7 Year B 2024

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26, 1 John 4:11-16, John 17:11-19.

Prayer Power

During recent Sundays in Easter we have had a number of extracts from what we call in the Gospel of John “the farewell discourses.” They show how Jesus prepared his disciples for his absence and come obviously before his passion and death. They are remembered and written long after his death and resurrection perhaps 40 years or more being the last of the gospels and come from the mouth heart and hand of the one we call the beloved disciple and those listening to him – they have an intensity of love that is unbroken by savage times in the world of religion and politics. The temple has been destroyed, Christians have been expelled from the synagogues and face persecution by the empire. None of this stops the power of God in Christ at work in the church, none of it stops the remembrance of the love received and shared, and none of it stops the sharing of word and sacrament, rather all of this magnifies the power love and presence of God in Christ within the Church. There is no looking back for nostalgias sake but remembrance for the work of the present and for hope in the future.

One cannot fail to be moved how these Farewell discourses recorded by the beloved disciple are so heartfelt. They disclose the divine love at the heart of Jesus’s relationship with his disciples but also his relationship with His Father in heaven and prayer is at the core of them. Jesus’s prayer before his passion becomes even more appropriate for Ascensiontide and Pentecost for it demonstrates his

concern for us that is once more at the heart of God in heaven. Such prayer is surely the root and source of the power that allows that unstoppable growth of the early church at a time of such seeming danger, fragility and marginalisation – three things that face us all too obviously in our own age and time.

Jesus prays for his disciples – he prays for us – what a wonderful thing. There are three key words for us to carry in our forward journeys. They are at the heart of his prayer and desire for us to embrace hope, contemporary hope in the midst of any challenge. They show love in action that flow from , the loving prayer at the heart of God as trinity.

Keep. The word implies a loving watch – as a parent may watch over a child. Jesus asks the Father to Keep us - watch over us as Jesus himself has done. Jesus's purpose was to proclaim the kingdom to reunite and reconcile humanity with creator and this mission and desire is now entrusted to these disciples. The desire for them and for us for unity of heart and mind is quite different to uniformity – the disciples are a very diverse bunch. Jesus has made it clear and the acts of the apostles demonstrates what proclamation to all the nations might mean - division and discord will arise but they must be reconciled. The authenticity of our historic faith is given credibility by biblical disclosure. The history of the early church in Acts includes the warts and disputes between Gentile and Jew, Paul and Barnabus– this makes it real and true. Hope for present and future rests in Jesus's prayer and making it our prayer too.

Protect. Jesus asks that the disciples that we may be protected from the world for they do not belong any more than he does. This should not be

seen as any condemnation of what God has made and seen as good far from it (as we reflected on Thursday) It is about remembering we are made by God and not the world, in the image of God and not in the image of created things however wonderful. It is a call to right balance in the Christian life - to be fully immersed in the world and delight in all that is good in the world without being *of* the world. The creator not the created defines us. So divine protection can never mean a sort of heavenly inoculation that bestows a force field against pain and suffering that comes when we are immersed in the world. It means not being crushed by its woes, or beguiled by its delights to forget who we are, who made us and why. We may be ridiculed and bullied – but we are not to do likewise, we may be belittled but we are not to do likewise, we may be praised for our wealth success or power but we are not to do likewise, we may be persecuted but we are not to do likewise – to respond in kind is to fall prey to the “evil one” as John describes it. This is not an easy balance of living in the world without being of the world rather than of God. Jesus knows it requires something else. And so our last word:

Consecrate. A Greek word for the hallowing and setting aside of a person for sacred work and purpose. It is something external to the person, something given to them. It is about being externally equipped for purpose. It is not about their state of character, of purity and perfection it is about being given something that doesn't belong to them. The disciples and us are to be workers and witnesses to the truth of God, the reality of his love and values of the kingdom. They are not perfect for purpose but like Matthias and like you and I, they are chosen and we are chosen and God we consecrate, equip and enable as he sees fit and as

we are open to His grace. Elsewhere Jesus says do not worry – your Father knows what you need and do not worry what you are to say for the Holy Spirit will equip you. Such confidence doesn't flow from training certificates and credentials, or from self-belief; it flows from knowing who Jesus is and resting in the love that flows from God in Christ and who as John puts it lives in us when we live in such love.

Individually and as a Church we have much that could make us feel alone and even in despair if we were just of this world. But we are of God and his love in Christ keeps us, protects us and consecrates us throughout the joys and sorrows of life – not just for our sake but for the sake of the whole world. Such is the power of Jesus's prayer for us all.

This power of prayer and living in the spirit will be the mark of our two Sundays – Pentecost and Trinity.