

Sermon 24th May 2020 – John 17: 1-11 Easter 7

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.

Imagine, if you knew you would die tomorrow, what would you do? What would you pray for? A longer life, more time? When we get to the point in John's Gospel, for our reading today, Jesus knows his time on earth is drawing to a close.

Jesus was depending on the disciples, depending on them to spread the message of love, mercy, and compassion to all the world.

Jesus was depending on the disciples, but he would not leave them alone, for he promised them a helper, one who would come to give them the needed power to spread his message.

The disciples knew all of this. And today in the church year is a day of waiting, a time for reflection, a time to stop, to ponder, to listen quietly, to pray, to feel, to experience, to wait and to wonder.

In the sequence of events, last Thursday was Ascension Day, the day Jesus rose into heaven, and next Sunday is Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit visits the disciples with power, it is known as the birthday of the Church.

Today, is a waiting day, a day to reflect upon all that Jesus had said, all that he had taught, all that he had done.

I imagine the disciples at this moment felt confused, felt alone, felt lost, were wondering what was going to happen next.

They had just seen Jesus rise into heaven, they had just seen their friend, their teacher, their Lord go away from them. This was a glorious event, for now they were certain that Jesus was with the Father, now they knew for sure that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, now they knew for sure that Jesus and the Father were really one.

But, on the other hand, now they were alone, without their friend, without their leader, without their companion. Yes, today in the lives of the disciples was a day that was really in-between times, in-between the time when they had Jesus with them, but before the time when they would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

And I think it is very appropriate that this text from John's gospel has been chosen for today. For if the disciples could recall this conversation with Jesus, if they could remember these words, this in-between time wouldn't seem so frightening, nor would they seem so alone.

This was Jesus' high priestly prayer. The prayer that Jesus prayed with his disciples before the events of Holy Week. He prayed this to comfort the disciples who could not understand this prayer then, but now following the His death and resurrection, following His ascension, now they could really appreciate the words of this prayer, now they could understand what Jesus was saying, what he meant.

Jesus wanted the disciples to have faith, to remain true to the Father, to believe in the promises and teaching he had given them. Jesus knew that in a little while after his ascension, the disciples would receive the power of the Spirit to carry on His work, so he prays that they would remain true, they would remain in the faith.

Before lockdown, we went to Barmouth in North Wales for the weekend and in the estuary the local sailing club was holding a dingy race.

The wind was up and the competitors were getting ready for a race. The sky was blue with tufts of white cloud and the breeze was strong, the brightly coloured sails were dancing in the wind as the waves splashed against the harbour wall and railway bridge.

One chap had dressed his boat but gone back into the sailing club. The little dingy bobbed up and down in the waves, waiting. The dingy was a laser, a fast sailing machine, it's lines were clean and smooth, yet it bobbed helplessly next to the dock. It's sails danced playfully in the power of the wind, but the dingy did not move.

Its sails shook in the breeze with eagerness to be used. The boat was ready, but it didn't move because it's master wasn't there.

The disciples were exactly like that dingy.. They had all the power from Jesus, they had the mission spelled out, they had the tools at hand, but as yet they didn't know how to use them, they didn't know how to set sail.

They needed the Pentecost experience, they needed the guidance of the Spirit, they needed the power of the Spirit to get their boat sailing in the breeze. Jesus prayed that they would be drawn together while they waited to get started in their mission, that they would not loose faith, but they would remain in the Father.

There are many times when you and I are not quite sure of our faith, or, perhaps like now, not quite sure what is going to happen next, not quite sure what the future is going to hold for us. At times like now, I think it is good for us to recall these words of Jesus.

It is good for us to know that even when we are confused, even if we don't know what is going to happen, even if we cannot get our boat sailing, we still have a relationship with Jesus, we still have faith. We can still cling to his promises, we can still rely on his presence in our lives. We might feel in-between, but Jesus is still there for us.

People who are isolated, those who have lost a loved one, people who are facing sickness, people who are confused, it is in these situations, when we go from one thing to another, not knowing what is going to happen next, not knowing where we are going to get the strength to carry on, it is in these kinds of situations that these words of Jesus can speak to us.

He says: 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one'.

As those words were comforting to the disciples, they are also comforting to us. In our in-between times, Jesus is telling us to remain in faith.

As the disciples faced an in-between time in their lives, in between the Ascension and the Pentecost, they could recall these words of Jesus where he prayed for them to remain in faith and to remain in the truth of God's word.

As we face our in-between times, we know that Jesus is praying for us to remain in faith, and remain in the truth of God's word.

We thank him for those prayers and we pray that he will give us the power to be faithful to him and to his words, today, tomorrow, next week and always.
Amen