

Sunday 28th May Jesus' prayer for unity - 'that we may be one' John 17

I wonder if you noticed that our Gospel reading this morning is a prayer, part of a prayer prayed by Jesus for his followers, and all those who would come to believe because of the words they shared.

The opening of this chapter reads 'Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "*Father...*" '

The whole of this chapter is Jesus' prayer to His Father on our behalf. Do take some time this week to read the whole chapter. The prayer has a pattern to it. Jesus makes a request and then gives a response. It is not a linear prayer but a bit like a corkscrew... coming back to the same theme from a slightly different angle.

The theme for Spring Harvest this year was 'One for All' and this chapter was the basis of the Bible Study each morning because as you read the whole chapter you will see 3 times Jesus prays that we, His believers, may be one as He and His Father are one...

vs 11 at the end of our reading today He says '*protect* them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

vs 20/21 I ask... that they may all be one

vs 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one

We have seen, this week, as a nation, the power of good when a community comes together as one. Just a week ago no-one had envisaged the atrocity that was about to unfold in Manchester on Monday evening. No-one had anticipated the horrific and sudden deaths of those 22 people, many of them young or parents of young people. But in the midst of the chaos, as it unfolded, local people were offering homes to strangers and taxi drivers were driving from Liverpool to be available to those who needed transport. During the week, we have seen continual demonstrations of unity across that city and across our country. In the midst of people's loss and suffering, strangers have reached out to offer love and care. True signs of unity in the midst of diversity.

In a much smaller, yet also devastating situation in Bath, I know of another community that has reached out in generosity to help and show love to a local family. On Wednesday mum Michelle was upstairs sorting some bits out whilst her 3 children were playing downstairs, waiting for their dad to come home from work. The youngest who is just 5 and has some learning difficulties, came to her and said 'FIRE'. When Michelle went downstairs the corner of her lounge was on fire. She managed to get the children all out safely and then call the fire brigade but the fire spread quickly and destroyed the house. They have lost everything. People in the church have sent out pleas for clothing, including school uniforms for the children, they have set up a collection point for people to take things and they have set up a Just giving page that has raised almost £5000 in order to help them start to put their lives back together. The community, which has a less favourable reputation across Bath, have pulled together in a fantastic way to help this poor family who suddenly and unexpectedly lost everything.

People around us are suffering

People across our world are suffering. In the post yesterday came the prayer diary for Open Doors - the organisation that supports persecuted Christians around the world - you remember the 'Live like a Refuge' series that we looked at during Lent last year? Within the prayer points there is a stark reminder of the suffering MANY experience because of their faith

Peter writes... do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you.... We live in a world that is not yet perfect. The words of the Lords Prayer 'Thy Kingdom Come' are our request that God would bring about an increase in His Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. But we are still waiting for that perfect heaven and earth to be restored.

It is wonderful to see communities coming together in fantastic ways to support others who are suffering... but I wonder why we sometimes have to wait for such a tragedy before the unity is evident?

Why is it that in the day to day our differences seem to become more important and more dominant than our similarities? Whether that be across the church, across our country or around the world?

In our New Testament reading this morning (1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11) we read in verses 7&8 Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your *faith*...

The devil, the adversary, is at work prowling around and looking for someone to devour says Peter

I am sure you have all seen on some wildlife documentary a pride of lions out hunting. You will see one or 2 of the lions picking out the weak animal, isolating it and then going in for the kill.

The lion knows that in a group the animals are stronger and more protected but if they can isolate one then there is more of a chance that they will be able to make a killing.

Iceland pictures

- 1...Glacier... huge powerful imposing carving up the landscape
- 2...Thick wall of strength
- 3...As it reaches a certain point huge chunks begin to break off Ice bergs in some places
- 4...These pieces gradually reduce in size and in Iceland they ended up on the beach where the sea washed in and out wearing them away
- 5... until they broke up, melted and became a part of the sea water

The strength of the ice compacted together was incredible but as pieces broke off and became isolated they lost their strength and gradually became eroded away and absorbed into the sea

One scheme of the devil, adversary is to prowl around and isolate us, to cause division and disunity

Separation and isolation can be very effective in making us forget our connections. The differences in our social groups can become the focus of our attention instead of our common humanity.

This can be true in the church as well as in our wider community

Difference does not need to result in disunity

Unity does not need to mean conformity

Unity can incorporate difference but that needs humility and discipline and maybe prayer too ! :-)

God's way is community and togetherness... Our reading from Acts (1:6-14) ends with

All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer together

Peter says to keep alert and stay steadfast in our faith remembering our brothers and sisters also... we are not alone. We born into families, communities, nations and our world.

Thinking about this during the week I remembered the quote - No man is an island. When I looked it up I realised I knew only the start of the quote, there is more...

"No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main."

This expression is a quotation from John Donne's Devotions (1624) - a poet and a priest

It is so easy for us to become fearful and anxious. Sometimes our media does not help - and these emotions can so quickly cause us to put up barriers and division between ourselves and others

But God IS community... we shall be thinking about that in a couple of weeks time... and togetherness and unity bring glory to Him.

We glorify God when we see the words as God sees it with full and deep love.

Jesus in John 17 is actually praying for unity

Why does he pray for this unity, for us all to be one?

vs 21 so that the world may believe that you have sent me

vs 23 that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me

I believe the coming together of many diverse people in Manchester and Bath this week brought glory to God, even if it was not recognised as such

It is sad if this form of unity is only seen when there is such tragic events that mean our differences retreat for a while

Let us be a glacier and not an iceberg or splinter of ice because then we are weakened and so easily become absorbed into other rather than being together in unity bringing glory to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen

A reading from the first letter of Peter

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is

revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God