

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 16th May 2021

Seventh Sunday of Easter

with Neil

Hello, I hope you are well. On this the seventh and last Sunday of Easter, our readings are Psalm 1 and John 17:6-19. Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

You who are passing through hard times: come!
 You who need strength to support those who are suffering: come!
 You who are full of happiness: come!
 You who are burdened and busy: come!
 Come; let us unite in worship
 of the one who offers us comfort and joy.

A prayer of approach

Gracious God,
 set apart as your people yet together in your world,
we worship you as one.
 Emboldened by your power,
 protected by your promises and filled with your peace,
we worship you as one.
 Upheld by your word,
 inspired by your truth and named as your friends,
we worship you as one.
 Keep us safe in the world.
 Keep us praying for the world.
 Keep us serving the world.
As one, in Jesus' name. Amen.

R&S 514 O for a heart to praise my God

O for a heart to praise my God,
 a heart from sin set free,
 a heart that always feels thy blood
 so freely shed for me;

a heart resigned, submissive, meek,
 my great Redeemer's throne,
 where only Christ is heard to speak,
 where Jesus reigns alone;

a humble, lowly, contrite heart,
 believing, true and clean;
 which neither life nor death can part
 from him that dwells within,

a heart in every thought renewed,
 and filled with love divine;
 perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
 a copy, Lord, of thine!

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,
 come quickly from above,
 write thy new name upon my heart,
 thy new, best name of love.

Charles Wesley (1707-88) altd

A prayer of adoration

God of yesterday, tomorrow and today,
 we are children of the world you love and care for.
 We praise you, heavenly Father,
 for calling us into relationship with you.
 We praise you, Lord Jesus,
 for the power of your name and the protection of your prayers.
 We praise you, Holy Spirit,
 for your guidance and gifts that enable us to draw others to you.
 For you are faithful in times of uncertainty,
 strong when we are weak,
 and the breath of all our being,
 the energy of all our doing and the peace of all our resting. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Forgive us, gracious God,
 when we have turned away from your word
 and immersed ourselves in the distractions of the world.
 Forgive us, when we have sought to belong to the world
 and compromised your truth to fit in.
 Forgive us, when we have bickered among ourselves
 and not shown the world that we are one.
 Forgive us, when we have distanced ourselves
 from those you have called us to serve.
 Forgive us, O God; protect us and unite us.
 In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Gracious God,
 we thank you for the enduring prayer of Jesus for his disciples
 which reaches and reassures us today as we walk in their footsteps,
 reminding us that we are not alone
 but protected, empowered, forgiven,
 and surrounded by your grace every step of the way. **Amen.**

A prayer of praise

Lord Jesus, as your disciples in the world today,
 we thank you that your word of truth,
 your prayer of power and your heart of love,
 continue to protect, inspire and unite us
 as we live out our faith,
 build up our relationships,
 and hold the world before you in prayer. **Amen**

Old Testament Reading Psalm 1 (NRSV)

The Two Ways

¹Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
 or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
²but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
³They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
 which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
 In all that they do, they prosper.
⁴The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Gospel Reading John 17:6-19 (NRSV)

⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Reflection

In this week's reading from John's Gospel, we read how just before his arrest, Jesus prays for his friends that they may be one as he is one with the Father. Jesus asks that they may be protected from the evil one and sanctified in the truth.

As we are aware, this passage follows on from John's account of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' last words to his disciples at the final meal before his arrest. Now he prays for his disciples as those he will soon leave because of his Passion. We might, with good reason, hear some echoes of the Lord's Prayer here in the way that Jesus addresses God as 'Father' and in his prayers for protection from worldly powers of hatred and evil that dominate this reading. Certainly, it looks like Jesus imagines the coming of God's kingdom being revealed through the unity, joy and faithfulness of his disciples (17:11, 13, 17).

If we were to reflect on John's Gospel, we would note that throughout his Gospel, John reframes the humiliation and tragedy of Jesus' execution in a number of poignant and astonishing ways. In John 1:39, the humiliation and death of Jesus is likened to the liberating sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. In John 3:14, it is likened to the healing serpent that Moses raised up in the desert. In John 10:11, it is likened to

the tender care of the shepherd. In John 12:24, it is likened to the fruitful seed that falls into the ground and dies. In John 13:1-11, it is likened to a slave washing feet as Jesus lovingly cares for his own. Here, in today's reading, John 17:6-19, as Jesus is now addressing God rather than his disciples, as one writer insightfully observes, 'the death that takes Jesus away from his friends is his prayer for them, and for all who will believe through their testimony (17:20-26). Anxious as they are in the absence of Jesus, his Passion-as-prayer is the triumph of God's love for the world over the destructive powers of evil.'

If we were to consider for a moment the first readers of John's Gospel, they would, of course, have received these words as those of the crucified and now risen Jesus. No doubt, in their context, they would have been greatly comforted and strengthened in their faith as they read of Jesus praying for them. Jesus does not just pray *for* them though, he also prays *with* them, as in the reading of the whole of this Gospel they are drawn into the offering of his whole life. Indeed, as one commentator writes, 'here, then, is a new perspective on what it means to 'ask in my name': it is to allow our life to be moulded by the vision that shapes his Passion.'

May I suggest that this reading opens up profound possibilities for us. Yes, of course, I sincerely hope that we may also be comforted and strengthened in our faith as we read the words of the Scriptures in our context today. But I also hope that we may embrace our calling to live following in the way of Jesus, in a way shaped by his Passion and finding the love and joy of God (17:13) as we live a life of service as those who are now sent into the world (17:17). Lastly, as we reflect on the way that Jesus prays, may we better understand the breadth and potential of prayer. As important as our prayerful words might be, prayer is not just about our words, prayer is about our constant conversation and connection with God that helps inform and shape everything we are and everything we do. Amen.

A prayer

As we move forward following our time in the Scriptures today, Lord,
we ask that our prayers may just be the beginning.

May our worship, our time here reflecting on the Gospel text,
what we have learned and what we have discovered,
lead us into action and lives full of worship
every hour of every day.

We ask in the name of Jesus,
whose whole life was an offering of worship to you. Amen.

R&S 432 Now is eternal life

Now is eternal life,
if risen with Christ we stand,
in him to life re-born,
and held within his hand;
no more we fear death's ancient dread,
in Christ arisen from the dead.

The human mind so long
brooded o'er life's brief span;
was it, O God, for naught,
for naught that life began?
Thou art our hope, our vital breath;
shall hope undying end in death?

And God, the living God,
stooped down to share our state;
by death destroying death
Christ opened wide life's gate.
He lives, who died; he reigns on high;
who live in him shall never die.

Unfathomed love divine,
 reign thou within my heart;
 from thee nor depth nor height,
 nor life nor death can part;
 my life is hid in God with thee,
 now and through all eternity.

Thee will I love and serve
 now in time's passing day;
 thy hand shall hold me fast
 when time is done away,
 in God's unknown eternal spheres
 to serve him through eternal years.

G.W. Briggs (1875-1959)*
 © Oxford University Press

Our prayers of intercession

Once again, hostilities between Israel and Palestine have reached the news cycle. We pray for the peacemakers in that area. Hold them from despair, give them the energy and vision for a better future that will keep them going during these difficult times. Help the local politicians and those in the international community who are trying to mediate and resolve this crisis. Equip them with the skills they need, give them the words that will speak into this situation and help those who need to hear listen to their words and cease their fire.

Lord, in a dark hour,
let your light shine.

As we roll out the vaccine in this country and celebrate a return to something that feels more normal, we are aware that this is not the experience of many people around the world. The scenes and stories from India and Nepal are deeply upsetting. We pray for help to arrive, for oxygen, doctors and for relief for those suffering. As things improve for us may we not forget to pray for people around this world who still face many dark days battling coronavirus.

Lord in amongst the pain and suffering,
let your light shine.

In the aftermath of the local, mayoral and Police commissioner elections we pray for everyone who has either lost or gained a job. Give people who are leaving their posts a sense of closure. Help them as they move on to something new. May they take the experience they gained and find ways to use it to empower and help others. For those who find themselves with a new job, give them the grace and humility needed to get to know new colleagues and work out what is required of them, and as our towns and cities emerge from coronavirus give us all patience with each other as we re-establish how to work and live with one another.

Lord, in a world of losses and gains,
let your light shine.

The blossoms on the trees and parks filled with plants and flowers at this time of the year remind us of the wonders of the natural world. But we are well aware of the difficulties facing our planet. The issues around climate change can feel overwhelming but we pray that the church has a voice in the debate and that we face up to our personal responsibilities.

Lord, in a world challenged by the climate crisis,
let your light shine.

In uncertain times we thank you Lord for the relationships and friendships that have carried us through: for those who have made us laugh, for those who have listened, for those who have stood by us. Thank you for the love, care and attention of others. Help us to learn to pray as Jesus did. As we move through this week and encounter our friends, help us to pray for their needs and that they would know your peace in their lives.

Lord, in all of our lives and friendships,
let your light shine.

We bring before you those we know and love who are in need. We are saddened to hear that Ruth Strudwick's Dad has died. We pray for her and all her family at this difficult time. We keep Nick and Meryl in our thoughts and prayers following the sad loss of Nick's Mum. May all who mourn know your comfort and love.

We pray for Chikondi as she goes into hospital and has major surgery on Thursday. We pray for Jane Smy as she has surgery on Wednesday. We think of Phyllis Davies as she leaves hospital and moves into residential care. We pray for Sheila as she recovers from her cataract surgery. Lord, we ask that you would draw near to all who are unwell and all those receiving medical care. May they experience your loving and healing presence.

We hold Kiki in our prayers as she now waits to hear about the outcome of the hearing, which we pray will be positive.

A moment of quiet for you to pray for those in your thoughts today.

Lord, in the lives of all those in need,
let your light shine. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The Blessing

And may the blessing of our gracious and loving God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be upon us and all those we love,
this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

Praying for one another, we say together:
**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all,
for evermore. Amen.**

With love and best wishes,
Neil

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