

Easter 7 2025 - The Sunday After Ascension Day (1 June)

John 17. 20-end - "Jesus Prays for Us"

A Sermon by the Rev. Jackie Bullen

Did you know that you and me are mentioned in the Gospel reading for today?

We are. Jesus is talking about you and me, in fact, he is praying for you and me in the passage sometimes known as his "High Priestly Prayer" in John 17.

In the first part of that chapter, Jesus has been praying for his disciples, the ones to be sent out as his Apostles. Peter, James, John, Andrew, Matthew—that small yet important group.

But then in verse 20 of John chapter 17, Jesus shifts his prayer to include others as well.

He says: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word"

That's you and me!!

Yes, us.

Today in 2025, here in Longthorpe.

We are among those who believe in Jesus through the apostles' teaching or I assume you are here today because you are interested in understanding more about Jesus' teaching.

We have the benefit of the witness of the apostles that we find in the New Testament Scriptures.

Through the Gospel that has been preached to us, through the apostles' teaching, through the sacraments the apostles were commissioned to pass on to the church from generation to generation.

It is through the apostolic ministry of Word and Sacrament that many people have come to believe in, to trust in, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and so we are included in this prayer of Jesus when he prays for "those who will believe in me through their word."

Here in his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prays for us.

So, if we accept that, what are the things that our Lord prays for us?

What does he want for us?

What is his will for us?

I suggest there are several things. The first thing he asks for us is this: “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

This is the unity of the church Jesus is praying for here. A unity not based on warm feelings or in holding hands and singing together, but more than that. This is a unity created by God’s own work binding us to himself, giving us the gift of faith, his work of uniting us in the life of the triune God.

Notice how Jesus describes this unity: “just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,” and again, “that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.”

In theology, this is what is sometimes called the mystical union, that all believers in Christ are one.

Paul teaches that we are all part of the body of Christ!

We say in the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church.”

We believe there to be one church, because that is what God has created and what Christ here is praying for. The “one holy, catholic”—meaning not the Roman Catholic denomination but the universal church. This is the unity that Jesus is praying for – praying for us – here in his High Priestly Prayer.

So how well do we measure up to this prayer? If this is Jesus’ prayer then where, we ask, is the place for division based on gender, theology, sexuality, tradition?

Has God brought us into one church or are we creating divisions which go against Jesus’ prayer?

This is a challenging question isn’t it?

Do we want to do everything we can to walk in the oneness God has given his church?

Do we want to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

I suppose my question is: do we live a hypothetical faith or a real, living faith?

Do we say the words and follow them up by our actions?

Do we 'walk the walk' to use modern parlance or simply 'talk the talk'?

Jesus prays for us, but in so doing he challenges us greatly.

Theoretical Christianity is easy!!

We can all say the right words...

But can we live it out?

'Talk is cheap', the saying goes! Actions can be costly, maybe they should be costly.

Jesus prays this prayer as he is about to go to the cross, to complete the saving mission for which he was sent. After his death on the cross will come his resurrection and, forty days after that, his ascension into heaven which we celebrated on Thursday.

So, when Jesus prays that we may be with him where he is, to see his glory, he is talking about our eternal life in heaven in the age to come. But, before we get there, we are called to be one with God, as he is with us, as Jesus prayed. We must live the life of our calling, not just talk about it. We must live our lives as Christians, not simply claim to be Christian.

I wonder how, then, can we fail, if Jesus is praying for us? The answer is simple, only by being determined to pursue our own goals, rather than his. By turning in the opposite direction and failing to do what Jesus prays we will do.

In simple terms, Jesus prays for us to be one with Him, with God; if that doesn't happen, then that is through our choices, our actions and that is a sobering thought. The thought and knowledge that the only way that separation from God can come, is through our own actions.

We often look for our prayers to be answered. I wonder if we ever look for Christ's prayer to be answered, and if we do, whether we consider what that means for us?

Amen.