

## A Reflection from Revd Ali for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Our Gospel reading today, comes at the end of several chapters in John's Gospel, containing Jesus' last instructions to his disciples. Jesus' teaching is reported almost in real time in that short period after the last supper, and just before Jesus' betrayal and arrest. This particular passage is sometimes referred to as 'Jesus' high priestly prayer'. In it Jesus is acting like the high priest of Israel, coming to God to intercede on behalf of God's people, and especially on behalf of his disciples.

I wonder, if we can imagine being there that night? I wonder if we can put ourselves in the place of Jesus' disciples gathering in the upper room? After all it had been a really complicated week. A real rollercoaster of emotions. The week had begun with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. Then Jesus had got so very angry in the temple when he chased out the money changers and the people selling animals and birds for sacrifice. Then there was his incredible teaching. Jesus opening up hearts and minds to the truth of the kingdom of God.

Perhaps it felt a little bit like this.....

*I remember being there after the meal was finished and listening to Jesus teaching well into the night. That was nothing new. We were used to sitting around the fire, listening to his stories until the sun came up. But that night seemed different. Looking back, we should have guessed what was going to happen. Jesus certainly knew. There was a new urgency in what he was saying. He was speaking like a parent, halfway through the door, about to leave their teenage children in charge of the house for the first time. He kept repeating some things. 'Love each other' seemed to be the one thing most on his mind. He told us that he was going away, and was coming back again and that we knew where he was going, and that we had to follow him. I have to be honest, we were a bit bewildered.*

*And then, it must have been nearly the last thing that happened before we came out to that dreadful place where they came and arrested him. We suddenly became aware that he was no longer talking to us. His tone of voice hadn't changed, neither had the kind of things that he was saying, but he was looking upwards towards heaven and was addressing his heavenly Father, the way he had taught us to do. Instead of talking to us, he was talking about us. He was praying about us and for us. I don't recall it word for word, but he prayed that we would be kept safe, protected from the evil one and that we would remain in unity with one another.*

*The memory of those words kept me going in the dark days that followed.*

*If we hadn't guessed it already, I'm sure we would have worked it out, something huge was about to happen and we were being entrusted with an enormous and important task that we didn't fully understand. But we weren't going to be left alone. That was what he had been trying to tell us all evening. With Jesus praying for us, we had the Father's protection, the Father's joy and the Father's holiness. We also had each other, we were going to be alright.*

In the first part of his prayer, Jesus asserted the disciples' identity. Jesus reminds God that his disciples have obeyed God's word, and that they recognize Jesus as God's Son. Jesus also acknowledges that God has given the disciples to him. That the disciples belong to the Father as well as to Jesus, because of the intimate relationship of unity between God the Father and God the Son.

Jesus then makes that extraordinary statement in verse 10 that 'all I have is yours, and all you have is mine'. Jesus is talking in such intimate terms. An intimacy that we recognize as being reflected in marriage vows. Jesus is claiming for those disciples and for us, God's promise that true believers share in this spiritual unity. Being 'one, as Jesus and the Father are one'. Because of Christ, we all are one body and one fellowship in the triune God.

Jesus then continues his prayer by praying for the disciples' safety. They need protection from the evil one, who will attack them because they don't belong to the world. The world being under the evil one's control. The world that hates them because they say to the world, 'there is another way'. A way of peace and love rather than of hate and covetousness. They will be kept safe by the truth that is God's Word revealed in Jesus Christ.

Over the last 2 weeks we have heard a lot about remaining in Christ. The importance of prioritizing a relationship with Jesus despite the demands of the world. By remaining in Christ we can be in the world, but by our words and actions can be salt and light and shine Christ's light in the world.

So what does this mean for us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Well, Jesus prayed this prayer for us too. Jesus prayed this prayer for all those who love him. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. By remaining in Christ we are kept safe from the darkness by the power of Jesus' name. Jesus prayed that we might be sanctified, made holy, like him by our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus' prayer for his friends is also a practical example of how we can pray for others and for ourselves. In this prayer, Jesus prays that the disciples would have a full measure of joy within them - the joy that comes from being confident of God's love for us and God's call on our lives. Jesus prays for the unity and for protection of the disciples. He isn't praying for an easy life for them or us, because there is work to be done. And that work may take us into places where we need the protection of the Lord, against a world that values things other than God. Jesus is asking for protection for us when we talk truth to power, when we stand up for the prisoner and the orphan, the refugee and the homeless. And Jesus prays for us to be holy and true. The disciples had been set aside for a special purpose, and so have we. Sometimes being set apart is a special and important place to be, but it can also be lonely and we need to hang onto the truth of why we are following him. Jesus makes this easier by explaining it to us – he is going there first and we just need to follow him. He is the way, the truth and the life, and in this prayer he reminds us of who he is and who we are when we remain in him.

So let us pray.

Loving God help us and those that we love to know the joy that comes from being in Christ, grant us your protection and peace and let us live in unity with others, loving and serving you. In Jesus' name. Amen