

## Sermon for St Peters - Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May 10 am.

A mum had taught her daughter to pray a set prayer every night before she went to sleep. One night she entered her daughter's bedroom to find her reading aloud the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Upon asking why, the daughter replied, 'I thought God might be bored with the same prayer all the time, so I am reading Him a story instead.' I am sure God was smiling and enjoying her story.

We know Jesus had a high focus on prayer. He set us an example by praying briefly in public, before meals, and sometimes before and after healing someone. We know from the gospel accounts that Jesus went away on his own, long before the day began or for long into the night for extended periods of prayer. This was especially true before any big decisions were made.

He also taught the importance of prayer and showed the contrast of true prayer with hypocritical prayer in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

The disciples saw His prayer life from afar but the examples of spoken prayer in their presence were few in the three years they spent with Jesus. At one point they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. We know that prayer as the Lord's Prayer, and we pray it at least once in each church service. It is the Lord's Prayer in that He taught it, but it is also the disciple's prayer and ours too in that it sets us a pattern for our praying. As well as the repeating of it, perhaps at times, during our periods of private prayer we could stop at each phrase and add in our own words as well. I am sure our honest and heart felt words would touch the heart of our Father God, much as the young girl reading him a bedtime story.

NT Wright, an incredible New Testament theologian and, the bishop of Durham for ten years, likens John Chapters 1 – 12 to being out in the public area where the disciples were able to learn about Jesus and the Jewish leaders, priests and the poor alike. As His disciples, they were also able to question Him and have extra private tuition at times.

NT Wright likens Chapters 13 – 16 to being taken into the private quarters of a house and being given inside information of the soon coming events that would see his death through to crucifixion but also His resurrection from the dead, His overcoming of death itself and a new beginning.

He teaches them about leadership through service, He speaks more often about His fast-approaching death and more openly reminds them that He won't be physically with them for much longer, but they won't be left alone. He seeks to guide them to love each other as He has loved them.

The disciples are still confused by much of what he says. He explains in several ways His relationship with His heavenly father, promises that the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit will live within them as their advocate, their helper, to teach them what they will need to know. He calls them His friends and states that He has chosen them to bear fruit that will last. He has a mission for them, reminds them to follow the way of love and gives warning that just as the world has hated Him because He loves his father in loving obedience, it will also hate and persecute them. He warns them that they will be scattered for a season but in time their grief will turn to joy. Previously He didn't emphasise as much, that they too would come under persecution. He didn't need to in John 1 - 12 because He was physically with them to bear the brunt of that pressure and growing persecution from the Jewish leaders in particular. And that brings us to today's Gospel reading from John 17.

NT Wright says that John 17, which we know as Jesus' High Priestly prayer is like going into the most secret room of a house where the owner is most fully known. Perhaps for us that would be like moving from the usually tidy enough for visitors, lounge to the man cave or the sewing room where not everything is ordered and, in its place, and where we reveal the real us in a deeper way.

Having explained to His disciples the meaning of His soon approaching departure from them, in this chapter Jesus moves from His ministry of teaching and reveals to them His priestly ministry.

Jesus lets the disciples see and hear Him at prayer. An intimate prayer in every way. There's intense, deep feelings and we see His true heart as He talks with his Father. Today we only read 11 verses of the 26 in this chapter. Within the whole chapter Jesus prays into three main areas. He prays for Himself, for His disciples and for all of us who will be following down through the ages.

He reminds God that the hour for Him to give His life in death for the sake of all humanity, including for our sake has now come. He asks God to use Him for this 'full and final display of divine love, as He offers his own life in sacrifice.'<sup>1</sup> He asks God to glorify, to honour Him so that He can glorify the Father in return. He reminds God that He has lovingly and obediently completed the work God sent Him to do and brought His father glory through that completed work and asks that now He can return to God's presence with the glory He had before the world began. It makes spine tingling reading, goose bump type when linked with John 1.

Let me read just two verses. Verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And verse 14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

## **What incredible love. What an incredible God.**

It is only through the coming events that Jesus can be exalted and His authority over all mankind be fully established. His desire for all mankind has been to be reconciled to a Holy God whom He addressed as Father.

As a young child I attended a Christian summer camp where I was taught that I needed Jesus' forgiveness for my sins to allow me to go to heaven when I died instead of to hell. For me as a child and teen, eternal life was about a place and a time in the future. It all seemed rather scary.

Jesus' prayer in John 17:3 gives a different point of view altogether and a much fuller understanding. 'Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.'

Eternal life is something we have now because of God's free gift of grace because Jesus has finished the work God asked him to do and has ascended to heaven. We step into this eternal life when we are born into the family of God and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We may have a personal and ever-growing intimate relationship with God our heavenly Father through our faith in Jesus Christ.

**We are truly blessed. We can live our lives in fellowship, in constant communion and oneness with God. We can grow in knowing Him.**

**This is a privilege that many ignore. God is always reaching out to us. Are we reaching out to get to know him more?**

Jesus prayed for His disciples, given to Him by God. He asked God to keep safe all who had come to believe His teachings, that they now knew Him as both Messiah and Lord. He had confidence that they would become the nucleus of the new church. He asked that as God the Father and God the Son were united as one that so the disciples would be one.

Later in the chapter he asked God to sanctify them by His truth so they would be able to stand strong in a world which would often hate them. Throughout His prayer he keeps the focus on His believers being ONE, followers able to reflect the unity of will and purpose that existed between Father and Son. so that the world would know that Jesus had been sent by God and had loved us as God loved Him. This also includes us today. He prays that they and all subsequent believers may also experience joy when proclaiming the gospel.

As He, a sinless victim offers His life as a perfect sacrifice, He becomes our great High Priest. His ascension which we remembered earlier this week, brought this into being. Jesus is our great High Priest and intercedes for us continually. He invites us to come close, to intimate loving relationship with Him.

Hebrews 4:14 - 16 puts it this way:

**<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

As Pentecost Sunday approaches next Sunday we are reminded that Jesus not only intercedes for us continually but that His ascension opened the way for the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, to be with us and in us to empower us to live for God in our daily lives.

Jesus calls us deeper, in the same way he called the disciples.

**Come, Follow Me. How will we respond to our High Priest today?**