

29 May 2022 John 17:20-26; 7 Easter; Pastor Fraser Pearce

Here's how today's reading begins: **'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one...**

OK. What's happening here?

Well, we're tuning into the final part

Of the last Passover that Jesus is celebrating with his disciples.

We're at the end of chapter 17,

But this section of the Gospel begins way back at chapter 13,

And all these chapters are set on the night before Jesus dies.

The whole thing starts with these words: **Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.** John 13:1

From this point we then begin to hear about

What Jesus says and does on that last night together with his disciples:

He washes their feet,

He foretells his betrayal,

He gives his new commandment,

He foretells Peter's denial,

And he gives his disciples his final words of teaching

As he prepares for suffering and death.

So, think about the significance of the timing here:

Jesus knows what is to happen, that death is near,

And he speaks his last words to his disciples.

No doubt many of you have spoken to people on their deathbed,

People that you loved, who loved you.

You've talked together knowing that death was near,

And that you would not be speaking to each other again in this life.

Words said at these times have their own power or significance.

Now the noteworthy thing about Jesus' last words with his disciples

As they are handed on to us in John's Gospel,

Is that they are not directly addressed to his disciples.

The last words that he says in the presence of his disciples

Are in the form of a prayer to his Father,

What scholars call Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

This is how chapter 17 begins: **After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son...** John 17:1

If you look in your bibles you will see that the whole of this chapter,

Is *one prayer* of Jesus to his Father,

And today we tune in to the very last part.

Let's hear again what Jesus says: **'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word...**

Let's pause here.

We are listening in,
If you like, we are eavesdropping to how Jesus prays to his Father,
And not just how he prays,
But how he prays *for us*.
Did you notice that Jesus says that he is asking
Not only on behalf of his disciples with him in the upper room,
But also on those who will believe in him through the word
That the disciples would proclaim?
We are people who have come to believe through this word,
And we are people for whom Jesus is praying
On this last night, as he prepares for death.

Before we go on to hear what Jesus prays for us,
It could be helpful for us first to think about
The sort of things that we pray to God for.

We generally and naturally pray for the things that we need,
For the things that we want,
Whether it's for restored health, harmonious relationships,
Secure work, encouraging friendships,
Or, thinking more widely, for peace in our world,
For stable and good government, or for the care of creation.
Now there's nothing wrong with praying for these things –
On the contrary, Jesus teaches us to pray
'Give us today our daily bread',
And Luther, in the Small Catechism rightly unpacks this petition
To include the sorts of things that I have just mentioned.
So, let's not give up on the life of prayer,
And on asking for the things that we need and want.

But let's hear what Jesus asks for from his Father,
What he asks for in the presence of his disciples,
As he is about to go into suffering and death,
He says: **'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.'**
Jesus prays to his Father for his disciples
That they may have the gift of unity,
That they may be one.

Now there are different sorts of unity in this world,
Achieved in different sorts of ways.
There's the relatively insignificant and voluntary unity,
Of sports fans cheering for their team at a game,
And there's the rather more complex
And less evidently voluntary unity of a group of soldiers
Going into battle under the flag of their king, or nation, or party.
But the sort of unity that Jesus is talking about
Is the unity that he has with the Father,

The sort of unity enjoyed by the Triune God.

And Jesus says that when this sort of unity is made manifest,
When it is seen in the communal life of flesh and blood human beings,
Then *God* is revealed in the world.

This is what Jesus goes on to pray: **As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**

Did you notice that unity among disciples
And belief in Jesus by the world
Are naturally connected together in Jesus' words?
Jesus develops this point as he goes on in his prayer.

Listen to what he says: **The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, 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.**

We know that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
Are not interchangeable, that they are different persons.
But we also know that among the persons of the Trinity,
There is not domination or control or compulsion,
On the contrary, we know, as Scripture says, that God is love,
And the shared unity of purpose, of will, of understanding
Among the persons of the Trinity,
The shared glory, is what Jesus gives to us.

Jesus is about to show the greatest love
As he lays down his life for his friends, for us.
The cross of Christ shows us the love of the Father for us,
And it is in receiving this love,
That we are free to love each other,
And for the love of God to be revealed in the world.

This is how it is put in 1 John 4: **No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.** 1 John 4:12
His love is perfected in us, *reaches its goal* in us,
Including the goal of bringing the world to faith.

What Jesus goes on to pray
Reveals the depth and power of God's love in Christ Jesus,
A love that is not only active in this world,
But a love that reaches back before creation,
And extends to life with God in the resurrected order.

This is what Jesus prays: **Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.**

Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father,
Loved by his Father before time, before space,
Loved by him before the foundation of the world.
It is *this* Jesus who prays for us,
That we may be with him where he is,
Including, in his Ascension, as a human being,

In the Father's house, where there are many dwelling places.

Again, 1 John reflects this sort of teaching,

Listen to what is written there: **Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.** 1 John 3:2

In being where he is, we will be like him,

And we will see his in his eternal glory.

Jesus then prays: **'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'**

That is how the prayer ends,

And from this point Jesus goes to the garden,

To his suffering,

To his death,

And through his death to his resurrection.

In the prayer that he prayed on the last night with his disciples,

And in his suffering, death, and resurrection,

Jesus has made the name of God known to us: that name is 'Father'

Like Jesus we pray to God as 'Father',

We pray to God knowing that we are dearly loved children

Of the creator of heaven and earth.

We pray knowing that he loves us,

A love that bears suffering,

A love that conquers death.

And since we pray to the one Father,

We know also that we are brothers and sisters,

Called by the Father to love one another,

And knowing that as we love one another,

The love of God is revealed in this world,

And the world comes to believe that Jesus is indeed sent by the Father.

Since through our baptism into Christ,

We are brothers and sisters in the one family,

And since we have a gracious, compassionate, and merciful Father,

Let's simply admit when we make mistakes,

Confess our sins to God and each other,

And, in receiving forgiveness from God,

Forgive each other from the heart.

Little children, let us love one another,

And live in the unity for which our Lord prayed.

In Jesus' name. Amen.