

Seventh Sunday of Easter

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Introduction

The Ascension illustrates Jesus oneness with God, as someone said it speaks of humanity in the presence of God – human experience in fullest measure is present in the divine. Jesus promises his disciples that they will be hated as he was. As they face conflict, their oneness in Jesus will bring them into relationship with the divine. That divine presence is discovered not in a far off ‘heaven above the skies’, but personally and in the experience of unity among believers.

Text

John 17.1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

‘I 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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for 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. I 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And 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.

Comment

Conflict lies at the heart of this passage from Jesus last prayer for his disciples. The Ascension marks the end of the incarnation and Jesus is no longer with his disciples as before. “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.” (v11)

Earlier in John (15,18) Jesus said “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.” The disciples had seen the consequences of the world’s hatred of Jesus and here Jesus is promising them nothing different from what he had experienced.

So what is Jesus’ response as he leaves his disciples in a hostile world? To take away all conflict? To promise them that they won’t feel pain, defeat or loss? To promise that they will be seen to be victorious in conflict, in the end?

Jesus response to the conflict that the disciples will face as his followers is found in his prayer. But let’s take it from the beginning of this passage.

A major theme in the first paragraph is around the word ‘glory’. John uses the word glory to refer to a word, action or experience through which God’s presence and character is made real. Jesus prays that in what lies ahead for him, his death by crucifixion, the truth about God would be revealed. (v1 and v5)

The second theme is ‘eternal life’. This isn’t ‘life for eternity’ or ‘long-lasting life’ it means participation in divine life. Eternal life is offered to all who have been given to Jesus. And what is eternal life? Eternal life is to ‘know’ God and to ‘know’ Jesus Christ whom God has sent. Those who have eternal life are those who recognise in Jesus the ‘glory’ of God. Jesus role as teacher was to enable his disciples to ‘know’ God. Through Jesus words and actions he revealed who God is, and for John to know Jesus is to know God.

As far as their training as disciples is concerned all that is now needed is that they ‘know’ God, no degrees, no special high level training qualifications, ‘knowing God’, being in relationship with the living God, was all they needed to be equipped for the work that lay ahead and the inevitable conflict that they would face.

What is given to the disciples is his prayer that they would be protected (v11). That protection was that they ‘would be one, as we are one’. In other words that their ‘knowing’ God would be protected, that they would continue to experience a relationship with God and with Jesus Christ: but there is more! John expresses this oneness with God and with Jesus as inseparable and indistinguishable from their ‘oneness’ with one another – ‘that they would be one, as we are one’ (v11). To be one with others who follow Jesus is part of what it means to experience being one with God and Jesus Christ. Christian unity is not an optional extra! It is part and parcel of what it means to know God and Jesus Christ.

Response

In our own experience, is ‘knowing’ God and Jesus enough in times of conflict?

In conflict, what is gained by ‘knowing’ God? Even that you are one with God and Jesus, how does that help?

Sometimes in conflict it is difficult to perceive the presence of God and the companionship of Jesus Christ. How much can the support of others, our ‘oneness’ with other followers of Jesus make real for us the accompaniment of God?

In what ways does unreconciled division among the followers of Jesus distort the potential of God's people?

The Ascension illustrates Jesus oneness with God, as someone said it speaks of humanity in the presence of God – human experience in fullest measure is present in the divine. Our oneness in Jesus brings us into relationship with the divine presence. That divine presence is discovered not in a far off 'heaven above the skies', but in the experience of unity among believers. Is that true?

Prayer

Jesus your greeting for fearful disciples was Peace,
Yet you sent them to face conflict in the world.
We are afraid, afraid of suffering, pain and death,
And you say that you will be with us.
Is that enough? Will we not lose everything?
Teach us what it is to 'know' you,
that nothing can separate us from your love.
And when through weakness we are unable to recognise you
May your body, the Church, mediate to us your presence and peace.

Amen