

Reflection - 7th Sunday of Easter  
24/05/2020  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 1: 6-14	Jesus tells the disciples they will receive the Holy Spirit, and ascends to heaven.
Psalm 68:1-10 32-35	God's enemies are scattered and he cares for the needy Worship the Awesome God
1Peter 5	Instructions to elders and farewell
John 17: 1-11	Jesus prays for his disciples

### Introduction

In last week's reflection we looked at Relationships. Our relationship with God, our relationships with our fellow Christians, and our relationships with those who are not yet Christians. This week I would like focus in on aspects of those final two relationships. Firstly let us look at our relationship with our fellow Christians, as we look at Unity, and especially as Jesus tells us in John 17:11 :-

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

And secondly let us look at our relationships with others we know who are not Christians with respect to how we are called to be Witnesses in Acts 1:8 :-

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

### Unity

Let's look at how we are called to Unity with our fellow Christians. This week on Thursday we celebrated the Ascension. In our Anglican Prayer Book it is set down as a Principal Holy Day, but as it is always on a Thursday, it is not always highlighted so well. But of course, the Ascension is an integral part of our Christian Faith and the formation of the Christian Church. If Jesus had not ascended, would he still be walking around on earth with his Resurrection Body? Of course, this is a question we will never know the answer to, because he did ascend. But how might the Church look if he hadn't? Jesus ascended, and as he promised, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with all who would be his followers. We say the Church's Birthday, the Church's beginning was on the Day of Pentecost, but Pentecost could only happen because the ascension happened first.

In the reading from Acts today, we hear the Resurrected Jesus telling his disciples that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and that they will be his witnesses, but I would like to look at the time between the Ascension and Pentecost. The disciples of Jesus at this time were a very small group, but they stuck together in the upstairs room. As Christians now we are called to stick together. It has been very challenging in recent times as the Government has, and rightly so for our protection, enforced isolation upon us, but even in great challenges we are called to stick together. I have been encouraged to hear how people have been calling one another, and staying in contact, and this is something we need to keep working at.

We also heard how as they stuck together, they devoted themselves constantly to prayer. As Christians today, we also need to also be devoting ourselves constantly to prayer.

Those first Christians must have found it very hard. They were a very small group, and although they had witnessed the Resurrected Jesus, their Leader was now gone. They were only able to continue because the Holy Spirit had empowered them to live in unity with one another. As Christians today we are called to live in unity with one another. Jesus prayed that we would be one, as he and the Father were one. It is hard to live in unity with others, as we are all sinful human beings. Let us seek to live in unity with our fellow Christians, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There's a great analogy of the power of Unity that I love to share with children and it goes like this:-

Have you ever tried to break a paddle pop stick. For small children it's a bit hard, but I can do it easily in front of them. Then I get 10 and tape them together, and try and get them to break the pile. I've had some boys try very hard, but they've never been able to break the pile. If we stick together in unity as Christians, we will be far better at achieving God's will for our lives, than if we seek to live as individuals.

Unity in Christ, though difficult to achieve, is something that should be evident in Christian communities.

### Witnessing

In the reading from Acts today we hear the Resurrected Jesus telling his first followers that they were to be his witnesses, in an ever expanding area that actually ended up including the whole world. I'm not sure about you, but to me this sounds like a very daunting task. In fact if we think back to Jesus and his first followers, they were an extremely small group. It says in Acts that before Pentecost there were about 120 of them. 2000 years later Christianity has grown to be the largest religion in the world, and yet, here and now in Australia, we find ourselves, probably in some ways, in a very similar situation to those first followers of Jesus. Most people who live around us are

indifferent to Christianity, and don't really know what "Good News" Jesus is for their lives.

We are called to be witnesses, and a former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple put it like this:-

"The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members."

If we really think about these words, they are quite challenging. We are of course mere human beings, and the task is so great. We need to realise that it is God's work, we need to trust God and rely on God, and in doing this we need to play our part.

You may have noticed over the last couple of weeks in the Pew Bulletin there has been a box entitled "My Kingdom Come". This is an initiative encouraged by the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, that we are to pray for 5 people we know who are not Christians, to become Christians, between Ascension Day and the day of Pentecost. I believe this is something we can all do, and I know there are many who already pray for others in their regular prayers.

As I said last week, we are not all called to be evangelists like Billy Graham, but we are all called to take our part as witnesses for Jesus.

As a Christian Community we are called to witness to the Forgiveness, and the Love of God that we have found in Jesus.

### Conclusion

We are coming to end of the Easter season. Next week is Pentecost, where we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit for all who follow Jesus.

Let us in our lives this week, seek to emulate the lives of those first believers.

May we seek to live in unity, working together with one another. And in unity may we continue as witnesses of Jesus, so that those around us might be brought to Repentance and come to know and accept the "Good News" Jesus offers. Amen.