

Reflection - 7th Sunday of Easter  
21/05/2023  
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, that they may be one

### Introduction

Good Morning, and welcome to worship on what is the Seventh Sunday of the Easter Season. Next week we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to all believers, and the conclusion of the Easter Season.

Today though, I would like to focus in on the last verse of our Gospel reading:-

<sup>11</sup> 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.

Today we hear Jesus praying for his disciples. He is no doubt aware of his impending death, resurrection and ascension, and he knows that he will no longer be with them in the same physical way that he has been for the last three years. So, Jesus is praying for his disciples, that they might be one, just as God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one.

Today I would like to focus on how we are called as Christians to be,

“One in Christ”.

And I would like to look at two aspects of the oneness or unity that Jesus is praying for. Firstly, what we are to be unified around, and secondly how do we work at this unity.

### Unity around Jesus

Firstly, what are we unified around? What did the first disciples of Jesus have in common? What is it that they were unified around? It seems to me that the first disciples were unified around Jesus.

It's quite clear that they were unified because of the experience they had of Jesus in their lives. When he witnessed the resurrected Jesus, Thomas was able to proclaim, “My Lord, and my God!”

In John's gospel we hear today:-

'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'

In Jesus they found the way to God. In Jesus they found the best way to live. In Jesus they found peace, meaning and purpose.

They described this ultimate way of living, as knowing they had "eternal life". In Jesus they had experienced the way to God, and through the resurrection, they knew that his wonderful experience of knowing God could never be taken away from them. No matter what challenges life might put before them, they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead, and they knew that they too would one day rise with him.

So, we know that the first disciples were united around Jesus, but we hear at the ascension how they were also united around the task that Jesus had given them to undertake. When they asked Jesus about when the Kingdom of Heaven would be restored, Jesus answered:-

'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> 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.'

As Jesus left his disciples in a physical sense, he entrusted them with the task of being witnesses of who Jesus was, and what Jesus had done for all Humanity.

Just as those first disciples of Jesus were united around who Jesus was, and the task of sharing this "Good News" of Jesus, with all the world. We too are called to be united around who Jesus is, and of sharing his message of hope with others.

### Working at Unity

Being united as one, and working together with a common goal, is a wonderful ideal, but not always so easy to achieve, because we are of course, fallen human beings.

We see how this was a challenge for the first Christians as we read about their disagreements in the Acts of the Apostles, and how in many of Paul's New Testament letters, he addressed issues where churches were dealing with conflict.

But we also see how they did work together, and how they shared the "Good News" of Jesus, and how many responded, and the Church grew.

How do we come together as one?

I would like to look at some of the advice we received in the reading from 1 Peter 5 today, on working together as one in God's Church.

Firstly, we hear about the work of the elders in the Church. Peter assumed that the Church would have structures in place. That there would be elders responsible for oversight. We hear Peter describe how elders are to work willingly and not to lord it over those in their care. And we hear how the authority of the elders is to be accepted, by those who are in their care.

We of course have different structures in the Anglican Church today, but we have these structures to enable us to work together in unity. Leadership is still required to be by example and with kindness, and authority properly used is still to be respected. The structures of the church are of course human and imperfect, but we need them to provide a way that we can work together toward the common goal of living together as one and sharing the "Good News" of Jesus. Without structures in place, we would end up with anarchy. We are all a part of "the priesthood of all believers", but differing levels of authority and responsibility properly used will help us to live together as one.

Secondly, we hear how we are all called to be humble with one another as fellow Christians. Humility was not a virtue in the ancient world of Jesus day. Pride was the virtue to be admired. But of course, Jesus turned the world on its head. Jesus was countercultural. And though the influence of Christianity may have waned in our western society, humility is still admired as a virtue. The more we treat one another with humility, the more likely we will be able to live together as one.

Thirdly, we are called to cast our anxiety on God. When we hand our anxieties over to God, we are more likely to be able to get on with one another.

Finally, we are called to discipline ourselves and resist the devil. If we are disciplined in our Christian faith, we will more likely be drawn to daily prayer, and the reading of the scriptures. Prayer draws us into a deeper relationship with God and with one another. The more we pray for one another, the more likely we are to be able to live in unity with one another.

### Conclusion

Jesus prayed that we, as Christians would be one. Obviously as we look at the number of different denominations and churches around the world, we have not lived up to God's ideal. But Christianity is the largest religion in the world today, and despite our many differences, Christians are still united around Jesus today.

The Church is still a work in progress. Let us today be mindful that as members of the Church, we take our part in the faith that is the very best thing in the world for our lives.

May we continue to seek to be united as one, so that we can complete our mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus in all the world. Amen.