

Sermon on Sunday 1 June 2025

by Rev. Scott Martin

(Reading: John 17. 20-26)

'The crucified one is the risen one, who eternally invites us to a place prepared for us at his table.'

Our Gospel for today continues with John's Gospel; the reading we just heard is often described as Jesus' farewell narrative. We are at the point just before Jesus' arrest, and he is preparing the disciples for something that they haven't yet experienced, namely, being disciples without having Jesus physically visible and present with them. The time is coming when they will have to enter a new way of being with him and relating to him, and Jesus prays for them as he prepares them for that.

The central theme of Jesus' prayer in this instance is unity. Not only does Jesus pray for his disciples to be one, but he also prays on behalf of those WHO WILL believe in him through their word, the future Church, those yet to become members of the body of Christ. And the example of unity that Jesus gives here, is the absolute unity and oneness that he has, with his Father.

One of the interesting things about our Gospel reading this morning is that it is held together (or bookended), at the beginning and the end, by other verses that contain a common theme, revealing something about Jesus' prayer for the unity of his Church. The theme being, that disciples of Christ, "Are in the world, but are not of the world". In the world, but not of the world. In John's Gospel, we find Jesus describing those who

would follow him as "Those that do not belong to the world"; he describes himself as "Not belonging to the world". "Righteous Father," Jesus says, "The world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me".

What does that mean? To be in the world, but not of the world? And how does that influence Jesus' prayer for unity for his Church. What does it reveal to us about the love and Life that Jesus receives from his Father and in turn invites us into? What does it say about the kind of Life that Christ offers us? "I have come that you may have Life," Jesus says. That seems to suggest that he is offering to us something we don't already, naturally, possess!

Here's a question for you - it's a bit of a philosophical one, but bear with me! It's a question some of you have heard me ask before. If I asked you to "Show me... LIFE", to "Point out LIFE to me", would you be able to do it? By Life, I don't mean something that's alive or something that's living, I mean Life itself, with a capital L. If you think about it, strangely, it's not possible. You cannot show me Life. Life is certainly in the world, because all living things depend on it, they owe their existence to it. But Life itself is essentially invisible, we cannot see it with the naked eye.

In other words, Life with a capital L is in the world but not of the world. All things that we can see in the world - trees, animals, mountains, people - will pass away... but the Life upon which they all depend, the Life of God, does not pass away. And it is this Life, this TRUTH, that brought all things into being, that Jesus offers to us. That Life Jesus speaks of is the gift of Himself, a gift that is from all eternity. To be in the world, but

not of it, is not to reject the world, not to see God's creation as a bad thing. But to be born again, into the life that never dies and knows no corruption.

In our reading today, Jesus prays, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me." It's easy to overlook this, but this is a very profound prayer. Jesus is asking that those who would call him Lord, are themselves caught up in the life of the Trinity, the eternal communion of love that is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The idea of the Trinity is one that is not always understood by Christians, it can sometimes be approached as if it is a theological puzzle to be worked out. But, in fact, it is the very life of God himself, one of communion and love. Some of you may be familiar with the famous icon/image by Andrei Rublev in which three people are seated around a table, representing the persons of the Trinity. What's wonderful about this icon is that Rublev purposefully leaves a space between the three people seated at the table; a space, for you and for me, a space that is an invitation.

"Father," Jesus says; "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 have loved me before the foundation of the world." Jesus' farewell narrative in John's gospel is full of beautiful imagery such as this. It's well worth taking some time to prayerfully meditate on the words; Jesus' prayer for his disciples... for us.

Our witness, to the world as the church, which Jesus prays for, is our unity in him. Life as the body of Christ, born into finite time, through the resurrection, is certainly no easy task. It has its power struggles, disagreements, conflicting priorities like most human institutions. But its joy, its freedom, the freedom of the children of God, as St Paul describes it, lies in the fact that the Church IS NOT just another human institution. The life that we will receive in a short while, when we receive communion or a blessing from Bill, is a life and a freedom not of human making, but of a divine initiative and outpouring into the blood, sweat and tears of our daily lives.

In the world, but not of the world. Christ continues to pray for the unity of his church, he continues to invite us into the depths of his Life, that invisible Life that the disciples had to get used to once Christ had ascended to the Father. A Life in which all of creation participates, that we die into at our Baptism, and look forward to in the sure hope of the resurrection. The crucified one is the risen one, who eternally invites us to a place prepared for us at his table. When he reaches out his hands, to raise us up, may we respond in unity and in love. Amen.