

Sermon 20 May 2020

John 17 is part of John's account of the farewell discourse, the last night Jesus shares with his disciples. We have had the washing of the disciples' feet and the breaking of bread in the last supper. Today's reading is John's account of Jesus' final prayer before departing for the Garden of Gethsemane and then his journey to the Cross

In the other gospels Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane with a degree of anguish. Yet the disciples do not hear his deeply human prayers as they fall asleep.

In John 17 Jesus is praying confidently and within earshot of disciples still awake and listening

He looks up to heaven. He prays first for himself. He confidently states: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,

Then he prays for his disciples:

20 "I ask not only on behalf of these (*that is his current disciples*), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word (*that is his future disciples ie you and me*)

It is a prayer focused on the future. The **immediate future** of the disciples but also the **more distant future followers** ie us

It is a prayer that focuses on **unity**. Why is unity of purpose important: because being united means the world will better believe God the Father has sent God the Son to be our Saviour: , 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,[f] so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

So unity is important as our "oneness" is a sign to the world of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

But like any family there will be disagreements. We are human. There is evidence of the fruits of disunity in our Acts reading you have Pharisee v Sadducee who will resort to violence such is their disagreement over the possibility of resurrection.

You may well be expecting me to talk about unity in our Churches of today. Instead, I want to take a risk and comment briefly our culture wars which I think we can all agree is generating a tremendous of controversy. Possible more heat than light? It is a brave person who strays into commentary on this complex and explosive topic. But I want to venture respectfully and with good faith to both sides using the prism of forgiveness.

In the final discourse in John we hear the great commandment: 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. For another defining characteristics of being Christian is that we are called to forgive those who sin against us - sometimes 7 times 70 times. And there are many times we fail in thought word and deed. The joy of Christianity is that through Christ we have the means of having our misdeeds washed away and so being then freed to be the people we are called to be unencumbered.

Our views change over time. There are things we said in the past we look back on as the folly of youth or as the mistakes made in our early walk with the Lord. And yet today something written in the past reflecting views no longer held is sufficient for some to be cancelled. Even if remorse shown.

I am so glad there is no social media trail that I know of about some my past thoughts and actions – when incredibly young of course.

This lack of forgiveness in our contemporary society seems to be me to show a total lack of mercy, grace and, dare I say, love.

And before we are quick to pick up stones and join one side or other of the cancel culture wars, let us examine ourselves. My lived experience is that failure to forgive is deeply corrosive. I have seen lives warped by a sense of betrayal in divorce and then no act of forgiveness

I wondered whether to preach on this of the paucity of forgiveness in large swathes of today' world. Confirmation cam by way of coincidence last night. Sue and I could not find anything to watch. So many channels. So little to watch. So we gave the film, Unbroken, a go

At first Sue despaired: a war film. In the end it was a narrative on one man's of Survival, Resilience and Redemption in the face of unspeakable evil

This is an epic drama that follows the "Louie" Zamperini who had a troubled youth, fought against his faith, along with two other crewmen, survived in a raft for 47 days after a near-fatal plane crash in WWII-only to be caught by the Japanese Navy and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Terrible treatment.

Yet he in faith he found the grace to forgive. To meet up and reconcile with his tormentors. Except the main character who refused. forgave. And is so doing he found peace and release.

May we do likewise

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