

## Sunday after Ascension - John 17:6-19

Down the ages, observers have watched the human race precariously perched between two worlds – ‘neither beasts nor Gods’ as Gilbert Meilaender puts it, in his book titled with the same words, as he writes on the ‘dignity of the human person’. Like other animals we are driven by our biological needs and subject to the physical environment. But unlike them, we are able to rise to a level of creativity and abundance of life that aligns us closely with God. This fits with the Christian description of humanity, as created ‘in the image and likeness of God’. But, like other animals we often fall short of this likeness and in order to restore our right relationship with God and with each other, we need divine assistance, which is what Jesus provides.

This passage is of course, part of John’s Farewell Discourse, or ‘high-priestly prayer’. Coming after he gives his final instructions to his disciples, and before his betrayal and crucifixion, this is a Farewell Prayer with a sense of urgency to it. Jesus knew what was to come for the disciples – and for himself – and although he had explained this to his disciples, he also knew they were not yet fully prepared. And so Jesus comes before the Father, at a time shortly before the completion of his earthly ministry, concerned for His disciples and asking for God’s protection as the disciples, now commissioned as future apostles, are soon to be sent out into the world to witness God’s love and purpose, without the guidance and direction of Jesus in human form.

This passage highlights a pivotal moment in the lives of the disciples, though they may not have realised it at the time, for they were soon to experience the shocking events of the betrayal and crucifixion of their beloved teacher and leader – which would leave them bereft and traumatised.

The first part of this passage stresses that everything is from God, and it also testifies to Jesus’s divine authority. Because Jesus is one person with two natures, human and Divine, through his close relationships with both God and humans, he is able, through his divine self, to bridge the gap between the two, enabling him to bring the gifts of God to the people of God.

This prayer is also a model that Jesus is teaching his disciples during this crucial time, as the completion of his earthly ministry approaches. A model of intercession with Jesus demonstrating how to make prayers of intercession relevant, in verse 9 we read, *‘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.’*

And we know Jesus continues to intercede for us – Hebrews 7v25, *“Consequently, he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them”*.

Jesus goes on to emphasise the communion existing between Him and the Father, *“All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them”*, offering us a vision of truth, and a mystery so deep, it is really difficult for us to fully envisage!

Significant too in this passage, *“my joy made complete in themselves”*, a reference to abundant life, which for John is likely to be more than existential, intellectual, biological or mystical life, but of life in all its fullness.

In the final part of today’s reading, Jesus knows his disciples will be vulnerable as he leaves them to return to the Father. It was one thing when he was physically present, leading and teaching them, but quite another when they would need to ‘walk in His light’ and knowing they would face spiritual attack, Jesus asks God to *“protect them from the evil one”* and for his disciples to be “Sanctified” in the Word – set aside, made holy, consecrated and sent out as Messengers of the Good News – as the best possible versions of themselves.

We are all different, individual and diverse, but made in God’s image as relational beings and, as we see the relational place Jesus holds with God, if all of us, as disciples, constantly seek and accept God’s protection, we will worship and minister in truth and in unity, as our identity and purpose is the same.

A unity that will benefit our worship and fellowship in the church and prove a fruitful witness in the wider community, as well as providing an effective stance against provocation and hostility.

Our diversity will enrich not just our individual faith journeys, but will also enrich and strengthen the effect we have as the Body of Christ. Diversity, not division.

There is so much more in this wonderful passage, but a few key reminders for us to take away this morning include:

The humanity *and* divinity of Jesus – and the effect this has on the relationship between Jesus and the Father;

The prayer of intercession, relevant intercession, modelled here by Jesus is of great importance to our own ministry of intercession;

The reliance we have on God's provision and protection at all times, and especially in the face of adversity;

Finally, and underpinning everything, is the absolute and unconditional love God has for each of us.

God loves us and wants us to share His love with each other, and with all we meet, for the furtherance of His Kingdom, to His Eternal Praise and Glory. Amen.

## Prayers

Loving God, the source of everything that is, we thank you for our home, the earth. We thank you for the changing seasons and for signs of new life in our gardens and in the countryside. We pray for people whose experience of nature is not so benign. People whose homes and livelihood are threatened by violent storms and unpredictable weather, especially those whose poverty means they have nothing to fall back on when disaster strikes. We think too, of people in Israel and Palestine and in other countries, locked in conflict over entitlement to land and resources. We pray for people across the world suffering through poverty and violence, and for Christian Aid and other organisations that seek to assist them.

Lord, in your mercy.....

Loving God, joining together everyone who loves you, we thank you for people who have shown us what it means to love and encouraged us in our faith. May your church set an example to the world, accepting people with different viewpoints and welcoming everyone searching for the truth. In our deanery we pray for St Denys, Little Compton, for everyone who worships and ministers there. And we pray for our new Parochial Church Council as they plan for the future of our parish. May the gifts of all your people be used in building up your kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy.....

Loving God, your Son, Jesus, chose his disciples to be the first Christian community, praying that they would be in the world but not of the world. We thank you for our community where we live and work and for everyone who shows neighbourly concern for others, thinking this week of the people who live on The Slade and Tanners Court.

We pray for our new Town Council and thank you for everyone who gives their time and energy on behalf of our town.

We think of people who feel excluded from our community, through age or background, education, income, health or wellbeing. Show us how to be inclusive in our welcome and care for all our neighbours.

Lord, in your mercy.....

Loving God, your Son, Jesus, prayed that you would protect his followers from harm. We pray for people who are ill and their carers and for other people known to us who need our prayers. We remember our family members, friends and neighbours gone before us and pray for everyone who is grieving the loss of someone they loved. Give us all faith in your unfailing care and hope of re-union in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy.....

Lord God, the source of all blessings, may we receive a blessing from each other, forgiving and forgiven, understanding and understood, healing and healed. May this be your blessing to us and through us, For our world and for all that long to be loved.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.