

Easter 7: 28 May John 17:1-11, Acts 1:6-14

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, it is the day we mark Jesus departure from this earthly life, to return to deep deep intimacy with God. It is about closure and affirmation and handing on the baton to us.

'The Acts reading tells us symbolically what happened, but it should not have us pondering the possibilities of Jesus in orbit, nor should we be imagining that for the days after Easter, Jesus resided somewhere in suburban Jerusalem. He didn't. He appeared and disappeared. The rest of the New Testament - and Luke elsewhere - speaks of the resurrection as the moment when Jesus ascended to be seated at God's right hand. The point was his vindication, the affirmation of his ministry, God's ownership of who and what he was and is. He returned to God.

Luke neatly has Jesus go with clouds and come again with clouds. ..The issue is not meteorology but mystery...What counts in the end is not the events, but the life and hope which the coming of the Spirit of Jesus brings for all'.<sup>1</sup>

So from last Thursday to next Sunday, liturgically, we live in the in between time, between Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost, and the coming of God's Spirit. After Pentecost, the Spirit through the disciples will take the offer of life to the whole world... Since Christmas we've whipped through Jesus birth, life, death, resurrection and now ascension.. and next week, the birth of the church, our beginning, the next phase of the gospel.

In John's gospel Jesus prays that we are one, as he and God are one. We hear this prayer in the week we pray for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non aboriginal Australians, a week when we have all been touched by the events in Manchester as well. The pain and sadness and fear, the displacement, reach out and touch our hearts too. We are connected by the air we breathe, by our humanity, as children made in the image of God.

Jesus came to bring life, eternal life, which means being in a close relationship with God, and therefore with God's creation.

'In verse 9 Jesus makes a request to God, but we overhear him. Jesus is worried about something: disunity and division. He prays that the disciples will be one in a relationship that is one of love, just like the relationship which exists between the Father and the Son. If the focus in understanding salvation is not on this relationship, between us and God and between each other, then the horizontal dimension of mutual love is more likely to be the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/AActsEaster7.htm>

casualty, because the appeal of the relationship with God is too often just a variant of greed (getting something for me)<sup>2</sup>.

John helps us avoid the commodification of the gospel and invites us to an understanding that we are good news by being a community in which love is lived out.

This is what it looks like here at St Paul's:

Last Sunday we had our first Messy Church. There were about 35 of us including about eight children engaging in conversation, exploring in craft activities, singing, listening, eating together, around the theme of Love. Those who lead the activities and many more of us have been praying that we might be channels of God's love.

Many in this place visit those who are sick or isolated.

Arthur has a significant ministry in the prison.

Christine delivers bread to many each week.

Others give generously to missions..

I listen to those in need, and visit.....

We are God's love in the world.

Jesus had needs. It is not about pretending we do not have them and that the gospel does not address them. Jesus states that he wants the closest relationship with God possible. That is what he is asking for. It is OK to ask for that. But that is not a commodity. It is a hope for communion. John's gospel is also pointing us to that as our hope - Generously Jesus wants nothing less than that we share the same hope which awaits him (17:24-26). It has a future because it has a present in which already here and now we share and delight in the life of God who is always taking initiatives of compassion. The greatest antidote to greed is to want only the reward of being one with the God whose being is self giving love.

John's gospel has a wonderful way of bringing it all together in focus and can help us recognise what really matters and that is being a community of compassion which touches every area of life and challenges all systems and instances where it is absent.<sup>3</sup>

So we donate money to help 'Martha' and her children here in Sale, refugees without support, except that given by the churches here..

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus.

It is that simple.

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<sup>2</sup><http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtEaster7.htm>

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Of course, what it means to “know” God is key, and to know God in the Fourth Gospel has no connection to cognitive constructions, creedal consents, or specified knowledge about God. Rather, knowing God is synonymous with being in a relationship with God.

John Main writes: What is 'important for us is to know from our own experience that God is the ground of our being [in which] we are rooted and founded. . . . This is the stability that we all need, not the striving and movement of desire but the stability and the stillness of spiritual rootedness. Each of us is invited to learn in our meditation, in our stillness in God, that [there] we have everything that is necessary.'<sup>4</sup> That is why we give time to prayer.

Christian Wiman writes 'You cannot devote your life to an abstraction. Indeed, life shuts all abstractions in one way or another, including words such as "faith" or "belief". If God is not in the very fabric of existence for you, if you do not find him (or miss him!) in the details of your daily life then religion is just one more way to commit spiritual suicide'.<sup>5</sup>

It is the seventh and last Sunday of Easter before the festival of Pentecost and the beginning of the long, green season, we hear Jesus' closing words,

*“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.”*

What if this blessing provided a theme for the entire season of Pentecost? Jesus is no longer in the world. The incarnation is over. Jesus has been resurrected. He ascended to the Father from whence he came (1:1). But we are still in the world, Jesus' works are now in our hands (14:12), and Jesus is counting on us to be his presence in the wake of his absence (21:15-17).

What if we imagined that the resurrection of Jesus was just the beginning and not the conclusion of the Gospel? That the promises of the resurrection are, in part, ours to fulfil?

How would a life of discipleship, of witness, of love, between Pentecost and Advent, be different were we to trust that Jesus meant what he said:

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<sup>4</sup> From John Main OSB, "Growing in God," THE WAY OF UNKNOWING (NY: Crossroad, 1990), pp. 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Wiman *Ambition and Survival: Becoming a poet*

*“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”*

We are in the world now, the world that God loves (3:16).<sup>6</sup>

We, at St Paul's are 'People of Christian faith – Encouraging connection between the Divine and the every day', as our vision statement affirms.

Our mission is to show Christ's unconditional love in action.

We do this knowing that Jesus is praying for us, nurturing and sustaining us, seeking to empower and guide and influence our ability to live life as well as we are able.

Susanna

Nikolai's study

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1996](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1996)