

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

ACTS 1:15-17 & 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

JOHN 17:6-19

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Bible reflection

Today in the church year is a day of waiting, a time for reflection, a time to stop, to ponder, to listen quietly, to pray, to feel, to experience, to wait and to wonder.

In the sequence of things, last Thursday was Ascension Day, the day Jesus rose into heaven, and next Sunday is Pentecost, the day the spirit of Jesus, his Holy Spirit visits the disciples with power. We sometimes call it the birthday of the church, and if you would like to, we ask that next Sunday we all wear something red to mark Pentecost.

But, back to today. Today is a waiting day, a day to reflect upon all that Jesus had said, all that he had taught, and all that he had done. I imagine the disciples at this moment felt confused, alone, lost, and they were wondering what was going to happen next, wondering if this was the end or just a beginning as Jesus had promised. They probably felt frightened, insecure, amazed, and perplexed.

They had just seen Jesus rise into heaven, they had just seen their friend, their teacher, their Lord go away from them. This was a glorious event, for now they were certain that Jesus was with the Father, now they knew for sure that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, now they knew for sure that Jesus and the Father were really one.

But on the other hand, now they were alone, without their friend, without their leader, without their companion. Yes, today in the lives of the disciples was a day that was really in between times, in between the time when they had Jesus with them, and before the time when they would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, this was an awkward time for the disciples. It was a time for them to think about the words of Jesus, to dwell on his teaching, to recall his promises for them.

And I think it is very appropriate that this text from John's gospel has been chosen for today. For if the disciples could recall this conversation with Jesus, if they could remember these words, this in between time wouldn't seem so frightening, nor would they seem so alone. This was Jesus' high priestly prayer. The prayer that Jesus prayed with his disciples before he was arrested. He prayed this to comfort the disciples who could not understand this prayer then, but now, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, following his ascension, now they could really appreciate the words of this prayer, now they could understand what Jesus was saying, what he meant.

Jesus prayed that the disciples would remain in faith, remain in the name of the Father, and remain true to the teaching that he had taught them. Jesus prayed that the disciples would remain together. For Jesus knew that in the unity of the disciples they would be stronger than if each went their separate way. In unity there is strength.

And Jesus prayed that the disciples should be in the world. As he says: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one." Jesus is saying that the disciples will remain in the world for He has a task which they are to perform.

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As Jesus ascends into heaven, He leaves the disciples with a task. They are to go out into the world and Baptise. But the time has not yet come, because the Pentecost event has not happened. Jesus tells the disciples to stay in the city and wait. Wait for the power from the Father. Wait and the Spirit will come.

They needed the Pentecost experience; they needed the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed that while they waited for all this, they would be drawn together. While they waited to get started in their mission, they would not lose faith, but they would remain in the Father.

During this Coronavirus pandemic many of us at times have felt like the disciples felt that day. We have felt alone, frightened, wondering if this is just the beginning or the ending. Thanks to the scientists, researchers, NHS, and many volunteers we now have the hope that the vaccines will signal an end to the pandemic. However, until the whole world has access to the vaccines there is always the danger of new variants spreading.

Just as the whole world needs to hear about and have access to the vaccine, the whole world needs to hear about and have access to God. We have been brought together into a church, into the body of Christ for unity and strength. Christ calls us to be in the world, not of it. The world needs us to help to lift people up out of the world and guide them to Jesus Christ.

How do we do that? Well, not by being miserable or self-righteous. Instead of complaining about all the things that are happening that we don't like, we should remember the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit living within each one of us. This should bring a smile to our faces and put a spring in our step. We are members of God's kingdom! Count your blessings every day.

The Christian life is not meant to be a journey to the grave with the goal of arriving safely in a well-preserved body, but a race to the finish line, used up, totally fulfilled, and loudly proclaiming, 'Wow! What a ride!'

We are blessed because we have a forgiving and understanding God. Even when we feel that we can't pray he listens to our hearts and his Holy Spirit intercedes for us. God continues to bless us so that we can be a blessing to others.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we read this: 'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.' If we are full of hope because of our faith in God, we will draw people to God. But if we are miserable, complaining and judgemental, then people will keep their distance, and I don't blame them!

Most of us have children and/or grandchildren. In 2 Timothy 1:5 we read: 'I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.' Do you pray for your grandchildren and children? I want to tell you a true story. A team visited Stavropol, Russia, in 1994 to hand out Bibles that had been locked away when Stalin was sending believers to the gulags. Among those who showed up was a young agnostic student just wanting to earn a day's wage. But soon he slipped away. A team member went looking for him and found him sitting in a corner weeping. Out of the hundreds of Bibles, he had picked up one that bore the handwritten signature of his own grandmother. Persecuted for her faith, she had prayed often for her family, her city and this young man. God used that grandmother's bible to convict him of his need for Jesus that day.

Sometimes we don't see the answers to our prayers, but we shouldn't give up. Just like with the young man in that story, our prayers will be answered, but in God's good timing. Are you praying for family or friends who don't yet know Jesus? I encourage you to think about 5 people that you know and commit to pray for them every day. You will be blessed for doing this as you will inevitably feel closer to them, and closer to God. God willing, you will see God at work in their lives as you continue to pray for them.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to pray for 5 people that you already know. That is how God's kingdom will come. If we want God to transform, revive and heal our society, then we must play our part.

We have our Church Annual meeting, here in church, in 2 weeks' time, on the 30th May at 11.00am, after our morning service. I encourage you to come along as we pray and discuss how God wants us to be his church in this place.

Let us pray...

Heavenly Father, we thank you blessing us in so many ways. Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we can bless others and draw them into your kingdom. Amen.