

## Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A, John 17:1-11

This morning I have a mini quiz for you. Now, if you're anything like me you may be groaning, thinking "Oh no! I'm no good at quizzes." Never mind. Let's start with the trivial questions:

- Which bird is the universal symbol of peace? (dove)
- Which animal has the highest blood pressure? (giraffe)
- What is the name for a group of hedgehogs? (array – or prickle!)

My next two questions arise from the gospel reading in John 17.

### 1. Do you have eternal life (v.2&3)?

"Yes, of course I do" you say and you may quote John 3:16:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

"So, I believe in Jesus and I am forgiven through his death on the cross. Ergo, I have eternal life." And that's right. John 3:16 is John's bottom-line take on having eternal life.

But in John 17 he expands this further when he quotes Jesus:

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

This is not just believing; this is a step further. This is knowing. Knowing someone is different from knowing about them. And there are degrees of knowing too. I guess that we all know Shaz in the village. We may have passed the time of day with him, praised him for the benefit he brings to the village or even had a conversation with him about spiritual matters. But that's not the same as really knowing him, even though it is more than just knowing about him.

And when it comes to the eternal life of knowing Jesus, intimacy seems to be what Jesus is indicating. It is certainly a step beyond not perishing. It is sharing in the intimate life of Jesus within. It is the intimacy of what someone has called the astonished heart, as we were talking about in the house group last week.

So, my first question this morning is not so much: do you have eternal life as, do you enjoy the eternal life of an intimate relationship with Jesus? Is

your heart astonished by Jesus and the Father? Or to put it another way, do you really know Jesus personally better than you know Shaz?

2. Do you pray like Jesus prayed? Yes, you say, I pray the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us. Good. And have you realised that when you pray the Lord's Prayer what you are praying includes something of what Jesus prays here in John 17?

Jesus prays for the Father to be glorified. And we pray *Our Father... hallowed be your name*. What did Jesus mean? What does what we say mean?

*To glorify God* means to demonstrate that he is worthy of honour and praise. Jesus did this through his life, his words, and his death.

*Similarly hallowed be your name* means that we pray that God (represented by his name) will be esteemed and honored. Clearly, we pray that this will happen in the world community but we also pray it for ourselves.

How do we hallow God's name, esteem and honour it? I suggest that we do it by the way we live our lives and the way we speak about him. If our lives are good and upright and our words are respectful towards God then we are hallowing his name; we are bringing glory to him. So let us pray that our conduct really does do this.

Jesus also prays that believers will be one, just as Father and Son are one. I think that's an extraordinary ask! Jesus is praying that believers will have the same close love relationship with each other that exists between members of the Trinity. Not that we will be one as in identical just as Father, Son and Spirit are not identical. But we are all branches of the one true vine. What would you say being one means? Pulling together, looking out for each other, preferring one another, caring for one another, partnering together with God to bring his kingdom on earth?

Being one is a difficult concept to explain in some ways. And for those of us who find images easier, there is an image at the bottom of this piece which expresses it a little. See how there is not even a cigarette paper's width between characters.

But we don't pray for unity in the Lord's Prayer do we? No we don't, not specifically anyway. But we do pray for something that would otherwise get in the way of unity. What is it? *Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who*

*sin against us.* Our own sin and failure to forgive others threatens our oneness, our unity.

Do we place as high a value on oneness with other believers as Jesus did?

Jesus's final prayer in today's gospel reading is for protection for believers against whatever will keep us from unity. He mentions the world and we can identify with that. We are constantly bombarded with ideas and attitudes in the world that, if we entertain them, will draw us away from each other. But very often, the things that we need protection from are things inside ourselves that cause division within the body of Christ, the church. Are we vigilant in these areas? Do we pray for protection?

So let us pray as Jesus prayed, for God's glory and our oneness. Amen

Chris Shaw, 21 May 2023

