

Year A, Easter 7, 17th May 2026

Acts 1:6-14, 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

This passage is so familiar that I don't think we realise how extraordinary it is. But the disciples almost certainly did and no doubt discussed it together later, piecing together their recollections until it acquired the form in our reading.

Chapter 17, called the High Priestly prayer, is sometimes lumped together with, and regarded as part of, Jesus's final discourse. And in a way it is. Jesus is still sat with his disciples at the table where they have had their last supper. We read *After Jesus said this he looked towards heaven and prayed.*

Chapter 17 isn't addressed to the disciples at all; it is Jesus's own private prayer to his Father. Although the disciples are there and no doubt Jesus is aware and intends for them to be listening.

But what is extraordinary is that here we have the disciples eavesdropping on Jesus's prayer. John does not give us Jesus's teaching of The Lord's Prayer but here we have Jesus modelling prayer.

You'll note that there is none of the anguish that Matthew, Mark and Luke record in the Garden of Gethsemane. That comes later. Jesus is aware that his crucifixion is coming but it doesn't dominate his thinking. Here is an intimate moment between Father and Son, reviewing both the past and the disciples' future with only a passing reference to his own imminent demise: *Father, the time has come.* This alone is extraordinary.

So what do we see, what can we learn, in the way that Jesus prays? Today we only have 11 verses of the prayer which comprises the whole of chapter 17. But in these verses I want to highlight three aspects of Jesus's prayer: intimacy, confidence and intercession.

Intimacy

First, intimacy and co-dependency. The way that Jesus addresses his Father displays a close, personal inter-dependent relationship. You have done this – given me people – disciples, friends – and the authority to gift them with eternal life, and I have done that.

At this point I think that we need to digress and consider what eternal life is.

If you or I were to go out into the street and interview passing churchgoers and Christians I suspect the majority of those who give an answer would say something about forgiveness of sin and a passport to heaven – everlasting, perpetual life in other words. And that is what the Greek word eternal means.

Some might go further and define eternal life in terms of the quality of the gifted perpetual life and talk about experiencing something of it now, here on earth. And that's what Jesus does in this prayer.

But how many of us would define eternal life, its essence as it were, as Jesus does. *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* This isn't intellectual knowledge but a deep intimate personal relationship. The church – the Christian community - is the bride of Christ. Now that's intimacy for you.

There are echoes in this prayer of Jesus's words in his final discourse:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love”. (John 15:9,10) Note here that the rules are the same for us as for Jesus; do as I do, he says.

And again there is the deep personal inter-relationship, based on love and obedience. *I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.* There is a quid-pro-quo here “I have glorified you Father by my obedience, now honour that by glorifying me.” Astounding!

Boldness

So boldness, confidence, is the second thing that we can see in this prayer. Jesus has no qualms about praying for himself such as we might have. He has complete confidence in asking – demanding even – that to which he knows he is entitled, based on his ministry in the world.

Can we take this as a prayer model and extrapolate it to ourselves? Well, in some ways we can, and in some ways we must modify it.

As we see throughout the final discourse, Jesus's overriding principle is to bring glory to the Father. Even when he is asking to be glorified himself it is to be *in*

your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. It is the Father's glory he is seeking.

So it would be inappropriate for us to ask to be glorified. But it is appropriate to boldly ask for the Father to be glorified through us. Do we? Or is that a step too far?

Have we the confidence that Jesus has to say "I have obeyed"?

Because obedience is a requirement for an intimate relationship with God. *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* (John 14:23)

How many of us can say "I have obeyed"? How often do we review our obedience? Can we say that our lives are in kilter with Jesus? That there is no failure to love another Christian, no responsibility for a broken relationship, no lack of forgiveness?

We have done all that God has asked us to do – apply to be a missionary in China, work in the local charity shop, visit a neighbour, invite someone for a meal, apologise.

If we feel that we don't have an intimate relationship with Father and Son, if God is not speaking to us. then maybe it is that we don't give enough time to the relationship, time sat in God's presence to have a real conversation. Or it may be what St John of the Cross called 'the dark night of the soul' – when we don't perceive God even though he is near.

But if not these, then perhaps we should ask what was the last thing God asked us to do? And did we do it?

Our obedience gives us the right to expect and to ask the Father to give us the things he has promised, just as Jesus could.

So the third thing that I am going to draw out of these verses is:

Intercession

Actually the whole of the rest of chapter 17 is intercession but we have only three verses in our reading.

And here there is no broad sweeping intercession for the world, but specific prayers for those to whom Jesus has given eternal life. *I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

That is not to say that we shouldn't pray for the world; we should. But here Jesus is praying for those who will carry on his life's work. And not just for the disciples present with him but for all who would later become so, including us. *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message",* verse 20.

Here Jesus prays that familiar prayer *that they all may be one.*

You, like me, will doubtless have heard sermons about being one despite our different denominations, different theologies and the like. How the nitty-gritty boils down to one basic belief in Jesus.

But that's not the emphasis here. Here the emphasis is *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.*

We are back to where we started: inter-relational intimacy between the divine and ourselves, an intimacy which will draw all believers into oneness.

That is where our unity is focused. Not on manufactured ecumenical church gatherings but on lives entwined with that of Father and Son and spiritually with each other.

This is what we should be praying for one another. Praying, as I pray for myself to abide in Christ intimately, so I pray it for you, and you for me. And pray, as Jesus prayed, that this intimacy will be protected from those influences which would drag us away or destroy it altogether. Can we do that?

And finally, this morning, I would urge you to eavesdrop later on to the remainder of Jesus' prayer by reading the rest of John 17. Amen

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