

## SERMON for Easter 7 - May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Readings: Acts 1: 6-14; Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 5; John 17: 1-11.

This week has been something of a time of being knocked around theologically, for me.

I have always loved chapter 17 of John's gospel, it stretches back years, from when I had a profound experience while I was meditating on the beginning of this passage.

Let's first put it in its correct context: Jesus is with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem - they are just about to go out to the Garden of Gethsemane, but before they go, Jesus prays. He is aware that his time is running short. He has just been offering his disciples words of comfort and encouragement, when he turns in prayer to God:

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. [John 17: 1b-5]

"... glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" ... wow! I remember experiencing for the first time the profound impact of those words and realised that Jesus may have been experiencing an incredible longing for the pain and the suffering of this life to be over and he be once again in peace and serenity, again at one with the Father.

Then he prays for his disciples, for their protection and that they be one - unified. How the Father's heart must break at the division and hatred that is so prevalent in the world today. How quick are people at deflecting responsibility for things - seeing who the finger can be pointed at, who to blame, political aggression causing conflict, either country to country or civil unrest, or taking pre-emptive, "defensive" strikes through instigating war, literally or through trade.

At a faith level, that is not even taking into account the disunity within the wider Church, the greater fellowship of all believers, with all the bickering about who's doctrine is right, who has the greatest share of the truth and so on.

The passage continues on, beyond what we have this morning, with Jesus praying "for those who will believe" because of the witness that his disciples will give. [John 17:20] In other words, you and I, and the countless people who have believed down through the last two millennia because of the apostolic witness.

The idea that Jesus, on the last night of his human life, prayed for me and you, still sends shivers down my spine and great humility into my heart.

Then, early in the week, I decided to see what British New Testament scholar, Tom Wright, had to say about this passage. What came out, for me, rocked me somewhat. Something that I had never picked up before and made me really think but also took me down new pathways.

I invite you to pick up your pew sheet and just quietly read the first four and a bit lines of our Gospel reading. Do any of you pick up something strange?

that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent [John 17:3]

Jesus purporting to refer to himself as "Jesus Christ". Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One. We are used to Jesus referring to himself as "Son of Man" or, as former mega church pastor, Jim Palmer, names him, Joshua ben Adam <sup>2</sup>, so suddenly I found this a wake up call!

Wright doesn't suggest that the inspiration of this prayer wasn't of Jesus, but rather that the writer of the Gospel ...

... has turned phrases round so that they become ... prayable by the continuing community. But in essence the prayer draws together everything that the gospel story has been about up to this point.<sup>1</sup>

Suggesting that John intended that this prayer be used by believers, Wright continues:

When you make this prayer your own, when you enter into this chapter and see what happens, you are being invited to come into the heart of that intimate relation between Jesus and the father and have it, so to speak, happen all round you. This is both what the prayer embodies and also its central subject matter.

At one level, this has reshaped my thinking of what this chapter is about – encouraging us to continue to pray to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit or Source of all being, Eternal Word and Life-giving Spirit – but also, our leaders – political, faith and community, as well as ourselves, those around us etc.

Recently, I have been reflecting upon how lonely it is for people who are in high levels of leadership. This has been brought to the fore for me, following a request from a dear friend of mine, to be there for her for prayer and support. When your usual sources are unavailable to you, yes, you turn to God, but often a more immediate, human contact is helpful.

St Paul writes in chapter 13 of Romans that we are called to obey the governing authorities. We therefore need to pray for our leaders, whatever we think of them.

I am sure we often forget that we are all beloved children of God, each trying to find our way to live the best life we can and, for many of us, trying to find our way to a relationship with God which seems right – which honours and glorifies God.

Last Thursday, the church celebrated the often forgotten commemoration of the Ascension, something our first reading reminds us of.

Following Jesus' ascension, the disciples were told to return to Jerusalem and wait to receive the Holy Spirit. I have often wondered whether they really understood what to expect, what they were in for. We tend to forget, however, that in the Church's calendar there are 10 days between Ascension and Pentecost which we will celebrate next Sunday. Ten days is a long time to wait for something, especially when you are not sure what you are waiting for.

Luckily for us, the disciples were obedient in this time of uncertainty. They were told to go back to Jerusalem (and they did!), they were told to wait (and they did!) and as they waited, they prayed together, worshipped God and experienced in fellowship and community, a sense of "church" and their reliance on God. And in their waiting, they were in unity, while the waited they prayed and were able to discern God's will for them.

Before leaving them, Jesus told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses in the world. As descendants of those disciples, in the family of God, it struck me that this is what today's faith communities are called to do, to be Christ's witnesses is the world, to restore, not the kingdom of Israel, but to restore the whole of creation!

This is where the likes of Jim Palmer and Richard Rohr and Tom Wright have knocked me a little sideways!

A quote from Richard Rohr appeared on my Facebook page during the week:

Christianity is a lifestyle – a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared and loving. However, we made it into an established "religion" (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish and vain in most of

Christian history, and still believe that Jesus is one's "personal Lord and Saviour" ... The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great. <sup>3</sup>

Setting that beside the writing of Jim Palmer, where he suggests:

The dominant religious tradition transformed Joshua into an object of worship while often ignoring the radical implications of his humanity. But the centre of Joshua's teaching was not separation from humanity. It was solidarity with humanity. He consistently dissolved the divisions people constructed between sacred and profane, insider and outsider, pure and impure, worthy and unworthy. He taught that one could not claim devotion to God while remaining estranged from other human beings. If you approached the altar while alienated from your brother, you were told to leave the sacrifice behind and repair the relationship first. Reconciliation mattered more than ritual.

He extended this solidarity even further by insisting that one's enemy belonged within the circle of moral concern. Service to God became inseparable from care for the poor, the abandoned, the imprisoned, the hungry, and the socially discarded. Loving God and loving people were not separate commandments. They were the same movement expressed in two directions.

Institutional Christianity has often betrayed this vision. Rather than deepening human solidarity, it has repeatedly divided humanity into saved and damned, believer and infidel, righteous and corrupt. Entire theological systems were constructed around the premise that human beings are fundamentally disgusting to God, spiritually defective at the core, and deserving of eternal punishment. The result has often been a religion organized around fear, exclusion, judgment, and psychological humiliation rather than liberation.

For us to fulfil the prayer of Jesus, to carry on the witness of the original disciples, what do we need to do, to be?

I would encourage you to read the whole of John 17, and to use it, as Tom Wright suggests, as a prayer, including a prayer for unity in our work to bring hope and light to the world and an end of suffering to all creation.

I close with a Collect which Revd Sue used on her blog:

Gracious God, our Source and guide throughout time.  
We gather to worship and pray  
knowing that we are already prayed for  
and all that we face and seek to do  
is already covered by our Lord's loving intention.  
When we and our brothers and sisters are sore pressed  
protect us, keep us under your wing,  
and when our days end, gather us to yourself. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

Revd Sally Buckley tssf  
17<sup>th</sup> May, 2026

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS::

1. Tom Wright, *John for Everyone*.
2. Jim Palmer, quoting from his book *Inner Anarchy*, in a Facebook post on May 9, 2026.
3. Richard Rohr as quoted on Facebook.
4. Revd Sue Lodge-Calvert from her blog [www.companionsontheway.com](http://www.companionsontheway.com) as posted on May 13, 2026.