

20140601SeventhSundayOfEasterSermon

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, this Gospel reading is part of Jesus' final discourse as given in John Gospel from chapter 14 through to 17. I said that chapter 17 was a prayer from Jesus - the longest in any of the Gospels. This prayer takes place just before his arrest. Now, don't think that Jesus is off alone somewhere with hands clutched together in prayer next to a big rock while the disciples lying napping in the background. No, this prayer is said while sitting around a table, after a meal and an extended conversation, with the disciples hearing every single word that Jesus says to his Father in heaven.

Think of this for a moment. What difference does it make to overhear Jesus praying for you? How will you hear Jesus' words in another way? How might we understand prayer in a new way?

This passage - can we make it a model for prayer? In the other Gospel's Jesus gets asked to teach his disciples how to pray and what followed was the ideal model for prayer the Lord's Prayer. Well, one could say that this is the Lord's Prayer according to John.

It's not often that we get a straight forward definition of eternal life, but here it is, "And this is eternal life, says Jesus, "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (17:3). If I were to ask you to define eternal life, I wonder how many of you would give this definition? I'm pretty sure not many of you. On this last Sunday of Easter, in the season of the resurrection, here is a concept of eternal life that might be different and stand out. Its meaning is something beyond the empty tomb and "Jesus Christ is Risen Today."

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus. What if it is that simple? How would that change what we imagine in this life? How would it affect our thoughts about and beliefs in our future life with God? How does this alter even our picture of God?

Of course, the key is what does it mean to "know" God. And to know God in this Fourth Gospel written by John is different from the other Gospels. Here there are no connections to experiential events, such as in Mark and Matthew's Gospels where the disciples are asked by Jesus who they thought he was, and Peter blurting out, "You are the Christ, the Son of living God". Rather in John's Gospel, knowing God is synonymous with being in a relationship with God.

Jesus says in his prayer that he wanted the disciples to know the only true God, and himself, Jesus whom God has sent. If we know Jesus we know God. If we are in relationship with God, we are in relationship with Jesus. Throughout John's gospel we hear about the signs that Jesus gave as signs of him being God incarnate. God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. Three big words to tell us that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere all the time. Some of these signs in John's Gospel demonstrate Jesus fulfilling these descriptions, demonstrating that he is God incarnate.

In John chapter two Jesus attends a wedding and the bridal couple run out of wine. When his mother asks him to assist he at first refuses but then does assist by changing water into wine. This task takes power - God remember is omnipotent - all powerful. So to change the nuclear structure of Water H₂O to the nuclear structure of wine is no great problem. I don't know the chemical formula of wine but being alcohol I suspect it has a OOH and the end of its carbon chain! But it is not just any old carbon chain with a OOH at the end. John tells us it is good wine! This Jesus we know so well from the Gospels is omnipotent to be able to do this.

Then in John chapter 4 Jesus heals a royal official's son. Jesus the healer in this sign heals from a distance - no laying on of hands, no spittle mixed with sand as with the man born blind. A child is ill in Capernaum, his father goes to Cana where Jesus is, and asks for his child to be healed. John tells us: *Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.'* *The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.* When he gets close to home his servants

meet him and tell him his son is well, his cure occurred the very hour Jesus told him to go. God is omnipresent which means God is everywhere, God's power can operate everywhere and here Jesus demonstrates that he is the incarnation of God by healing from a distance because he can be omnipresent.

In John chapter 5 Jesus heals a man at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus is right there with the man and not at a distance. But significantly he asks the man, 'Do you want to be made well?' God is omniscient. God knows all things. Jesus knew that that man had been ill for 38 years and was carried to the pool every day. He knew that the man was most probably avoiding being healed - for what reason John doesn't tell us. But Jesus, like God knows all things and Jesus knew. Jesus is omniscient. Jesus is God incarnate. That is the central theme of John's gospel.

Jesus is omnipotent, Jesus is omnipresent, Jesus is omniscient, Jesus is God - God incarnate. Yet Jesus is human too - so we can have a relationship with him. Someone I visited this week, taking communion, told me that they chat away with Jesus everyday. They have a relationship with Jesus - a relationship that has developed through daily chatting together. That person, according to Jesus' definition already has eternal life.

We all say that we know Jesus, we have a relationship with him. That he is our personal saviour. Well, then you have a relationship with God.

This is the seventh and last Sunday of Easter before the festival of Pentecost, Jesus' closing words of the gospel are more than a fitting finish to our Easter celebrations. "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." Yes, we are in the world, yes, it seems like we are left behind but we are in relationship with Jesus with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit who is with us and in us from the moment we were baptised.

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? In fact, that is what Luke does in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles. The Ascension is the beginning of that book and we heard about it today in our first reading. That book goes on to tell about the church and its growth. Jesus prayed that we might be one as he and the Father are one. As we look at the divisions in the church we realised how we have failed.

Jesus said at the beginning of his final discourse, "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." Yes, we are in the world now, the world that God loves. It is our task to do these greater things in our world.