

EASTER 7

16 MAY 2021

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

1 John 5: 9-13

John 17: 6-19

Prayer

God, you wait for us until we are open to you.

We wait for your word to make us receptive

Attune us to your voice, to your silence

Speak and bring your Son to us___

Jesus, the word of your peace

The Gospel reading is a long, detailed and dense prayer that Jesus makes , to his Father, on behalf of his friends, his disciples, those who follow him, not just the twelve, but all who come after, even us.

When you know someone is praying for you , how do you feel? What do you expect?

In one way at least, prayer is a bridge between the what is and the what we might prefer. It is a bridge between the world as it exists and the world as God wants it to be. But what do we expect to happen?

If we believe in an interventionist God, a supernatural being , then we hope that this god will change things to the way we want. We forget that there may be others wanting quite the opposite

Sometimes what we want does happen. This may be coincidence, or it may be brought about by the work of others, such as doctors, or maybe it happens because our prayer has focused us to act in a particular way , or it may be beyond any human explanation.

The trouble with this understanding is that we are left with the questions as to why god did not act with the intervention that we wanted?

My first real confrontation with this was when my baby niece died; despite a complicated and successful surgery she died of a blood clot in the brain at the age of three months. No-one, least of all my brother, could believe in a god who did not stop that if he/she could. So many people shy away from the god who did not prevent the holocaust or stop a volcanic eruption, or slow down a speeding car or saved one person in a flood and not another. What sort of arbitrary, capricious god is that? A god who has favourites and partialities?

For that sort of god demands right belief and right practice, the jumping through specific hoops and offers only a limited grace to a chosen few. This is the god of sects which hold that only a certain , finite, defined number of people can enter heaven and pits people against each other.

A different way of imaging God is as an encompassing spirit in whom everything that is, **is**.

This is what Paul means when he says God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Our relationship is in God, God is not out there, beyond us, but here, right here, around us and within us. We are not separated from God, we are not estranged .

This is akin to Jesus praying for the disciples and us. He understands us as being not in the world but in God. We can be part of the divine intention and the divine interaction. This view sees God, not as the direct cause of events but as a presence beneath and within our everyday lives.

Whether or not a situation changes because of our prayers the God who is beside and within us is in every situation. When we pray for healing or for a better outcome or for justice we are acknowledging that God is with us.

You will probably be familiar with the story from World war two when a young lad is hanged by the nazis and his death is agonising and painfully drawn out. Someone asks in anguish, “Where is God?” and the reply is “ Right here”, with the boy and with the helpless witnesses to the atrocity.

Where was God when my son took his own life? Right there in the car beside him, right there with my husband and me when we found him.

The situation is not changed but it is made bearable by the Divine presence. This Spirit , all encompassing, supports in the ongoing, unfolding of a person’s life. It helps make sense of what has happened and it enables survivors to make their world a little easier for someone else.

In this Gospel passage, in this prayer, there seems to be a divide between belonging in the world and being part of something different, heaven we might call it or the Kingdom of God. As he goes on Jesus’ prayer becomes that the world may believe that Jesus is not just sent from God, that he is one with God. John’s Gospel has said this from the outset: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son.*

That becomes our mission. That we, who are well and truly in the world and of the world may be recognized as being signs of God’s presence in the world.

We can be part of this prayer’s fulfillment as we live our lives with God within us . In our own inadequate ways we can show the world something of this divine presence , probably more through our actions than our words.

In order to fulfill this mission we need to be sanctified in truth , we need to be made holy.

Wow! Holy? Let’s explore that a little. Are you holy? Do you want to be holy? What does it mean to be holy?

Does being holy mean that you go around with a long face, wearing a hair shirt, never having any fun?

Well Jesus did not live that way... he enjoyed a party, he made jokes when his friends were being too serious. He obviously liked a drink if we are to believe the story of water being turned into wine. So while this does not mean license to overindulge it does allow for us to enjoy ourselves.

But joy, in this prayer, is less about having a fun time and more to do with our relationship with God. John's Gospel explains Jesus' relationship with God as of a son, an only son, his father's pride and joy. (I think we can allow for "daughter" to apply too).

This joy is wrapped up in knowing God, relating to God, as a child, full of trust, knowing that our imperfections will be forgiven. We see that when we recognize that the fledgling church is left in the hands of the likes of Peter, a mistake-maker extraordinaire, who is forgiven and offered more than one second chance.

We, like the early disciples, are to be aligned to God's intention. This is the presence of the divine beneath and within our everyday lives. This is a sense of what it is to be holy, close to God, so close as to be subsumed into God, enveloped by God.

If we are going to represent God to the world we need to be on the same page as the God of Jesus. Jesus speaks of his closeness to the Father, this is what he has emulated in his ministry. He has been there for the outcast, the poor, the disabled, women and children, slaves, soldiers, lepers, possessed, showing that God does care about these people, just as the Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures said .

In his encounters with Scribes and Pharisees Jesus strives to show them the meaning of the Law, not limited to the letter of it but to its over-arching purview, its reason to exist, the well-being of the people, people whose lives are undergirded by God, by the Divine presence.

As citizens of our nation we need to remind our government of this as we live it out in our every day lives.

If the Australian government purports to be Christian yet pursues power rather than justice, prosecutes many who speak truth, ignores the needs of the planet, allows far too many Indigenous deaths in custody to go unexamined, fails to find ways to bring about equality and reconciliation between First and second Australians, between genders, between different groups in the community and fails to welcome many of the strangers who seek asylum in our land, then it flies in the face of any notion that God is with us. It operates from a limited framework. Yes we know a Government does not have unlimited finances but it can find the money or better use the money it has to work for the good of **all** the people.

But when we live in the knowledge that God is within and around us, not way out there, beyond the edges of the universe, but here with us, then we can live the life of Jesus' prayer. We can offer welcome, hospitality, compassion. We can work for justice. We can do our best in the climate crisis. We can hold others to account and we can be better than we once might have been.

We may not be liked, in fact some might deride us or hate us, but our joy is in being in this so close relationship with God.

When we know our joy is in our relationship with this God who is so very near to us as to be within us, so immensely full of the universe that this God is all there is of the universe, so entirely all the love that makes life not just possible but bearable, then we can let go our pride, our hubris. We need not be self-centred or centred on the world but rather concentrate on God.

We can live with mystery and with what we cannot explain. We can embrace the other and include the stranger and reach out in compassion because this God is not finite. This love does

not have limitations. This grace is amazing. There is room for each of us within this God. We do not need to be jealous. We do not need to fear we will miss out.

This God, the Spirit of everything in the universe, personified as Jesus' Father and expressed as love, is more than sufficient. This God is infinite and to know and to live within and to love this Spirit is to have eternal life.

Thanks be to God.

Pam White