

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
24 MAY 2020 – EASTER 7

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we praise you this morning for the love, which grants us freedom, and for the grace, which allows us to dwell in peace. We praise you for the sun that shines upon our endeavours and for the moon and the stars at night, which remind us of your glory. We thank you for the many good things that you have bestowed upon us. Help us, O God, in this time of worship, and beyond, to have a heart that exalts in your grace and goodness, lips unafraid to proclaim your praise, and minds, which are focused on living according your glorious and living word. We ask it through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

SONG [No Other Name](#) CCLI 7019979

PSALM 68:1-4, 32-35

Rise up, O God,
so that your enemies and detractors flee from before you.
Like smoke driven by the wind, you disperse them;
and like wax melting near the fire, let them disappear.
But those who live justly will be joyful,
rejoicing in your presence, jubilant and glad.
Sing to God, praise the name of the LORD;
raise up a song to the name of the LORD,
to the one who rides upon the clouds,
and celebrate in the presence of God.

Listen! The rider of the timeless cosmos
who speaks with a mighty voice.
Acknowledge the power of the God whose majesty is over Israel
and whose power is in the clouds.
You are too awesome, O God, for your sanctuary.
God of Israel, you empower and strengthen your people.
Blessed be God.

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PRAYER OF ADORATION

Giver of power and strength,
you take a rag-tag bunch of denying disciples and feckless followers,
creating a new community of servants who seek to do your will.

Keeper of all time,
you are enthroned on the rubble of death's shattered power,
calling us to your side and giving us a new vocation,
by which we serve the broken of the communities in which we live.

Constant Presence of hope,
you strengthen us so we never give in while confronted by evil;
you continually pray for us that we never quit when faith proves to be more
of a challenge than we imagined.

God in Community, Holy in One, we lift our hearts to you. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we look around us at the world, at our nation, our local communities, our families, and we acknowledge the presence of conflict, pain and suffering. These all affect our lives at one time or another. We know that we can lessen the pain when we reach out to those who are hurting, and when we look for ways to bring restoration and healing where there is brokenness. We confess that there are times when we fail to recognise the suffering and needs of others and so forget to share your love revealed so clearly in Jesus.

Forgive us when we happily accept the blessings of life while neglecting to serve as he served - with unconditional love, humility and compassion. Forgive us where we are weak and when we fail, and empower us with your Spirit to be strong, yet gentle, bearers of your love and compassion through our words, our actions and our lives. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The Lord says that all may receive the water of life as a gift.
Through your trust in the Lord Jesus,
you will be saved, washed clean,
and your lives shielded in God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [Holy Spirit Rain Down](#) CCLI 2405227

BIBLE READINGS

[Acts 1:6-14](#)

[1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11](#)

[John 17:1-11](#)

SERMON [Jesus' high priestly prayer](#) [sermon.mp3](#)

SONG [In God we Trust](#) CCLI 7037224

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord Jesus, you prayed that we all might be one, as you and your Father are one. You knew we would be called on to work together to tell your story in the world. But, Lord some of us are shy. Some of us are old. Some of us don't have the confidence we think we need to speak for you. Some of us are tired and think someone else should take a turn speaking out. Lord, we pray for that unity of purpose you had in mind for us. Bring us together so that in all we say and do others will hear your voice calling to them. (John 17:1-11)

Lord God, you alone know the times and seasons of all things. We struggle to understand why sickness and death claim loved ones, why wars rage in holy places, why parents and people in authority abuse children, why the elderly suffer neglect and depravation. This world overwhelms our senses and causes us to reach out to you in prayer. And so we devote ourselves to prayer on behalf of victims everywhere, that they may know your constant presence in comfort and peace. (Acts 1:6-14)

Mighty protector, parent of orphans and protector of widows, provider of joyful homes, “we remember with joy and thanksgiving the significant women who have nurtured our life and faith: Eve, the mother of humanity; Sarah, the mother of Isaac; Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau and your people, Israel; Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah, mothers of a holy nation; Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus the Christ and Mother of God; and our own mothers and the men and women who like a mother nursed us when we were sick, nurtured and loved us, and nourished us spiritually with their wisdom and faith. We ask you to bless them, and to honour them in heaven as we seek to honour them here on earth. May our mothers and all women of faith know our love and gratitude not only this day but every day.” (Psalm 68:5-6a)

Mighty Healer, we pray for those who suffer, that they may shout for joy when your glory is revealed. We pray for those who seek healing for their body, mind and spirit, especially...

Today, we pray especially for ...

Spirit of God, rest on them and on all those who care for them, that your presence may be known and your joy may be revealed. We cast our anxieties on you, for you care for all people. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. (1Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Oh How Good it is](#) CCLI 6399212

WORD OF MISSION AND BENEDICTION

Go now, rejoicing in God.
Love the Lord, hate evil;
Be as one with one another, just as God is one.
Let all the world see the love of God
at work within you and among you.

And may God shield your faithful lives with love;
May Christ Jesus give you the water of life as a gift;
And may the Holy Spirit break you free from all captivity.
Amen.

BONUS SONG [Amen](#)

JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

Easter 7 Year A

Acts 1:6-14; Ps. 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Pt. 4:12-14, 5:6-11; Jn. 17:1-11

24/05/2020

Literary history records for us many interesting quotes from people—from the famous, the infamous and the relatively ordinary. We have all gained some amusement over famous last words, some of which are fictitious, such as:

- I don't think it'll bite me!
- Of course I remembered to lock the door.
- I can do that with my eyes closed.
- I wonder what this button does.
- Which button was I supposed to press?

Some people have also recorded *real* famous last words, such as those of:

- John Barrymore, actor, d. May 29, 1942: “Die? I should say not, dear fellow. No Barrymore would allow such a conventional thing to happen to him.”
- Edmund Gwenn, actor, d. September 6, 1959, who, when asked if he thought dying was tough, said, “Yes, it’s tough, but not as tough as doing comedy.”
- General John Sedgwick, Union Commander, d. 1864. . [SEP]Killed in battle during US Civil War. “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist...”
- And one of my favourites from the noted writer Oscar Wilde, d. November 30, 1900: whose last words were, “Either that wallpaper goes, or I do.”

Some last words are comical, others are more serious and many are memorable. Sometimes these last words give us some insight into the character of the person.

What kind of last words would you like to be remembered for? What are the last things you would want for others? What would be your final prayer?

As Jesus comes near to the end of his earthly ministry—having finished all that the Father gave him to do and yet anticipating the cross that was still before him, Jesus goes to prayer.

In verses 1-11 of Chapter 17, we have the beginning of what biblical scholars refer to as ‘Jesus’ high-priestly prayer.’

This prayer which occurs just before his betrayal by Judas and his arrest by the temple guards, is in a sense, Jesus’ last will and testament—his statement, in the form of a prayer to his heavenly Father, declaring the completion of his ministry, the nature of his relationship to the Father and his prayer for his disciples. This was especially poignant considering the suffering they would soon experience because of their faith in him. He prays that they might be one just as Jesus and his Father are one. To be sure, these are not his last words but do they form very significant part of his final words on earth.

Wrapped up in these first few short verses of Jesus’ prayer, we discover the meaning of the incarnation, the nature of the Godhead and the hope for all who follow Christ.

Now, let's just, for a moment, pause, and step ahead 325 years. The place is the city of Nicea—now known as Isnik in Turkey. The Emperor Constantine had recently defeated the Emperor Licinius and with that defeat there came an end to religious persecution in the East. At Nicea, in the year 325AD, 318 priests and leaders of the church gathered from all around the known world to iron out some doctrinal issues.

It should be remembered that many of those present had, because of the recent persecutions, suffered and had faced torture and the threat of death for their faith. These were not wishy-washy men. Many of their friends and relatives had died martyr's deaths for the sake of the gospel. Therefore, holding right doctrine was of utmost importance to them. What they believed about God and the church needed to be definite, notwithstanding the mystery therein. The main item on the agenda was one particular doctrine regarding the relationship between Jesus Christ and God, put forward by a gentleman by the name of Arius.

Arius proposed that if the Father begat the Son, then the Son must have had a beginning—that there was a time when Christ was not—and therefore was not of the same substance with the father. In short, Arius was saying that Jesus Christ was not God—that he was some kind of lesser being—greater than human beings, for sure but less than God. The Council of Nicea, after much discussion, condemned the beliefs of Arius and wrote the first version of the now famous Nicene Creed proclaiming that the Son is “one in being with the Father”—that in the nature of their essential substance, they are ‘one’ and the same.

The evidence for their declaration of Jesus and God being of one substance is found here in these first few verses of John chapter 17. In verses 4 and 5, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father,

“I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was.”

Here, Jesus affirms that he existed before the creation of the world. But then in verse 11, he prays,

“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me, that they may be one as we are one.”

And then later in verse 21, which was not read this morning, Jesus prays,

“...that they all may be one, as you Father are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

This is one of the fundamental beliefs of Christian faith—a central and foundational truth of the gospel—that Jesus Christ and God are ‘one’—in the fullest sense of the word—that Jesus is God, incarnate as a human being—being both totally human and totally divine.

I'm trying to make this very clear this morning because I want you to understand that unless we acknowledge the absolute unity of the Godhead—God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit to which Jesus pointed to in our passage from last week and mentions again later in this prayer—unless we believe that—we will never understand what it means to be ‘one’ with Jesus Christ and ‘one’ with God. Jesus prays for his disciples and later on for the whole church that, *“they might be one as we are one.”*

Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for the church, that they might be 'one' just as Jesus and God are 'one', encapsulates what it means for us to be 'in Christ' and to have Christ in us—to be in union with and in unity with our Lord and Saviour.

The reality of life and in particular, Christian life, is that Christians around the world are anything but 'one'. Through our sin, our rebellion and our wanting to make up doctrines that fit our moods and intellects, we have declared our unwillingness to be 'one', not only with each other but also with God and with Jesus Christ.

There are divisions, schisms and conflicting doctrines—there are liberals, conservatives and fundamentalists—all with their particular doctrinal persuasions. There are those who want to include everyone in God's grace and there are those who want to exclude everyone from God's grace—accept themselves, of course. The church today is anything but 'one'.

What then can we do about it? How do we seek the oneness with one another that declares our oneness with God? I believe that there are three things we need to do.

1. We must confess the sin of wanting to go our own way—of wanting to believe only that which suits us. We must confess the sins of heresy and unbelief that so pervade our spiritual lives. And we must confess the sins of our self-serving pride, our arrogance and our apathy towards the truth of the gospel.
2. We must not only confess our sin, but we must repent of it and seek to turn our lives around from following the gods of our own making—from following the god's of self and the world—to following Christ and seeking to be 'one' with him in all that we do. We must not only confess our sin, we must also change our hearts and our actions.
3. We must strive to live together as the bride of Christ in love and humility—encouraging one another and each considering the other person more important than yourself and so fulfil the law of Christ.

On our own we will never be able to bring the whole church back to the oneness that Christ envisioned in his prayer. We will never be able to restore the church to the state of submission to the will of Christ and our heavenly Father to which Christ calls us. But with God's help—with the help of the Holy Spirit indwelling us—we *can* change ourselves.

We can turn our own hearts around and in humility and love towards one another and God—we can learn what it means to be 'in Christ' and to have Christ in us.

And we can pray along with Jesus, the prayer that I am sure he is still praying for us, that we might all be 'one' just as he and the Father are 'one'.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—to whom be all glory, honour and praise—both now and unto the ages of ages. Amen.