

Sermon Easter 7 – Praying with joy

Acts 1:15-17, 21-end

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, 'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.' So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17: 6-9

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

We are at a between moment right now in the church's calendar - we are between the ascension of Jesus and the feast of Pentecost – feeling the loss of Jesus' earthly body but awaiting the spirit. The church gives these 9 days to prayer – and we call it Thy Kingdom Come. Our prayers together today are inviting the Holy Spirit to come.

Prayer – is one of those absolutes of Christianity – to be a Christian is to pray....

Ok confession time – I don't always find praying easy – how about you?

Praying often feels like a mumbling of thoughts – sometimes I feel like I am talking to myself – sometimes I don't quite have the words – sometimes I wonder why we do it and if there is any point.

But prayer – which we are focussing particularly on in this 9 day period but which we are all called to do daily – is essential to our Christian diet just as eating our vegetables is essential to our food diets... to be healthy Christians we must pray.

Prayer is being in relationship – it is talking and listening – it is also to be silent with God – just in God's presence. I rather like the description Rowan Williams gives which is that prayer is a bit like basking in the rays of God's love – feeling the warmth of God's love while we spend quality time in God's presence.

Sometimes we pray together – like this morning we are praying together in church and with those who are joining us using the online resources – and often we pray alone. Praying is something I hope we do ourselves as well as being led to do in church – we can pray when we are walking or waking or sitting at home – many I know make some dedicated space to pray everyday. There are of course many times when we simply express our prayers at the time we need to – in moments of fear or crisis or elation – we pray...

We pray for each other – knowing we are prayed for helps a lot when times are difficult – knowing our intentions are spoken out to the big world and to the Godspace we inhabit helps us to feel surrounded by love and care and protection.

I think prayer can be too much about making efforts to get the right words and say the right things – and certainly our prayers remind us of what matters – prayers though are not just words but also actions - so that we are making a difference in our world and we are living as the best Christian people we can be - if we pray for someone who we know is lonely and don't ring them or visit them we might question how we are praying.

Often our praying is desperate – when times are hard the praying is fervent – we go to the depths of our despair and God holds us in our darkness.

For many people – our praying includes saying thank you for our good things – to acknowledge everything amazing in our life – the small delights and the bigger blessings – all offered as a thank you.

Sometimes when we pray we might ask for things – we ask for changes to our jobs or our situations, maybe to ask for exam results or sporting triumph – maybe for a new bike – our requests are something we might take to the Lord in prayer... and maybe we think it is a bit

like magic – if I pray for this then it will happen like magic – but the answers to prayers don't always come as we expect just as any relationship can have surprises and beauty and challenges when we don't expect them. The answers can be right there and we haven't seen them. Maybe the answer is no there is another more glorious way.

I'm much taken with our reading from the Acts of the Apostle where the sense that God will choose the right person to be an apostle was so clear that prayers were said and lots were cast – I'm thinking about recent elections in this country and of course in this church as today is our first PCC meeting after the APCM and imagining if we had decided through prayer and rolling dice – what manner of ministry we might all be up for... actually – maybe that is a good idea haha!!!! I can see you'd all love that idea!!!!

Our reading from the Acts of the apostles reminds that prayer is in some way to hand over the control and allow God to show us the way – not easy if you're a bit of a super planner like me!

So with all of this thinking on prayer – what enlightenment can our gospel shed for us today – well I'm not going to lie – my first reading of it was very uninspiring to me – as I read it I felt deflated that there wasn't a juicy theme to preach on – no story of epic explanation – just a lot of words.

But amongst all these words I realised something so valuable and precious in this reading about praying - and that is that we get to hear Jesus pray for us... and his prayer for us is spectacular. It is not just us doing the praying but we are prayed for – and when we hear Jesus praying for us he prays for us to have joy. Joy! Jesus prays for us to have joy....

Joy made complete.

Joy is deep – beyond happiness and beyond the troubles we all encounter – it is a deep sense of completeness in Christ – and in church I hope we can feel that joy.

I hope and pray that you can feel complete joy.

How do you pray?

How might you try to pray?

How do you feel about your prayer life?

Do you feel the joy which Jesus prays for you?

Amen