



# *Seventh Sunday of Easter*

## *Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe*



29 May 2022

### READINGS

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21; John 17:20-26

## *Be calm while waiting*

Today, the Seventh Sunday of Easter, is the final Sunday of the Easter season. This past Thursday we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord and we now wait in anticipation for the celebration of Pentecost in 10 days time.

This time between Ascension and Pentecost has often been called the waiting time, the in-between time. It's hard to wait for things isn't it?. It's hard to be calm in our anticipation while waiting. It's hard to not know when whatever we're looking forward to happen is going to happen, and that lack of knowing makes us anxious.

I often think this time must have been an occasion of profound confusion for the disciples. They must have been unsure about the extent to which they could meet the expectations that others might place on them without Jesus around them.

Our Gospel reading today is part of the prayer that Jesus prayed for his disciples on the night before he was betrayed and later crucified. It is a long prayer that goes on for several chapters. Chronologically this prayer comes before Jesus' Ascension, but, in terms of its content, it is a post-Ascension prayer because Jesus' concern is for his disciples once he has left them. He knew that that experience would be challenging and therefore he prayed for them to be supported and strengthened in the challenges they would face. He offers them emotional and beautiful parting words of encouragement and hope. He prays that they may endure the challenges that come their way. He prays that they may discover strength in their unity. He prays that they will be drawn together as one, as Jesus and the heavenly Father are one. And then he prays not only for them, but for all for who will believe in him because of their testimony and witness.

So, Jesus prays not only for these disciples but also for those who will later believe because of them, he's praying for John's original audience and for all Christians ever since, and we are part of the story. On that significant, fateful night, Jesus takes time out from everything else that he was doing to pray for us. This time in our church year is referred to as the in-between time, the nine days of waiting and praying between Ascension Day, and Pentecost which we will be celebrating next Sunday

In fact, since 2016, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Justin Welby and John Sentamu, started a global prayer initiative called 'Thy Kingdom Come' to encourage Christians across the world to put time aside and pray with intention that more people come to faith during his timeframe. This initiative has now spread ecumenically around the world.

Sometimes though, we can find prayer difficult, especially in our busy lives, and may sometimes feel imprisoned by all the demands that are on us. Perhaps our reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles might help here:

In the first half of the reading we have a slave girl who was liberated by Paul; she obviously had a faith and recognised Christ in Paul and pursued him wherever he went, which evidently annoyed him – but her faith and perseverance in Christ set her free; ironically as she was freed, Paul and Silas are imprisoned but they too are set free by the power of the Holy Spirit. In both instances there is that sense of being liberated, set free to follow the call of Christ.

I wonder what we may be slaves to? Demands of our phones and emails, social media, the pressures of which can be enormous. Some of us here today, and those across our wider community may well be struggling and preoccupied with challenges at work, home or school; or dealing with setbacks in our professional or personal lives, or having to deal with stress, illness or loneliness; or those not far from us here are having to cope with the plight of homelessness or addiction, in all its forms.

It is quite instructive that Jesus, in his prayer for unity, protection and sanctification of his disciples, does not pray for more boundaries and rules. He does not pray for tolerance and being nice to each other. He does not pray that the differences between his followers will be removed. Instead he prays for our oneness. He prays that we would be one as he and the Father are one so that our unity would be the revelation of God's presence to the world. Oneness in the midst of difference becomes a witness of God's life in the world. Unity is not about eliminating differences. Unity, then, does not come from beliefs or propositions. It is not to do with statements or articles of faith. It does not involve us thinking or believing the same thing. Instead, unity is found in relationship, in the constant, continuing exchange of love with others within community; meaning that at best, unity is actually found in diversity.

It is when we are so immersed in God and in God's love that this love necessarily overflows from us in ways that we cannot always anticipate or control because the life of faith is a journey filled with surprises. Jesus prays constantly for a continual and continuing immersion into a relationship with Him so that: we will experience unity by sharing love, protection by experiencing the essence of God and holiness through living in Him.

May we be reassured that whatever we and those around us may face, we do not face it alone. Jesus is praying for us, as he was praying for his disciples, the oppressed, the lonely, the sick and the downtrodden back then, so he promises to continue to pray for us all in all our differences.