

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A, 2023

John 17:1-11

So here we are – post Ascension. Jesus has gone as he said he would and we're the disciples left behind wondering what to do next. By all accounts it wasn't the best of times. The disciples, we are told, went and hid for fear of arrest, persecution and, of course, crucifixion. They were quite accurate in their assessment of the potential dangers of the future and they ran away.

And it was out of this unlikely material that God chose to create God's holy church. The best we can say about that is that God seems to love a challenge!

Jesus' words to the disciples at the Last Supper, the words we read in this morning's gospel, call to mind the insanity of the whole enterprise. For here is Jesus, three years into an intense ministry of healing and reconciliation, about to give himself up to those who intend to kill him. Here is Jesus looking at twelve disciples and probably a few devoted women who do not exactly represent the power base of Israel. One of them has, in fact, already decided to betray him. They are a collection of small business men, tax collectors of doubtful reputation, and political hot heads. One

seems to have had a history of mental illness, maybe one or two had a bit of money, most are likely largely illiterate - ordinary folk who have demonstrated their lack of comprehension about Jesus over and over again.

It is to this same unlikely group that Jesus is saying, in the form of a prayer, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,’ Jesus knows his ministry is almost complete. He is facing an unspeakable death and he is afraid. We know he was afraid because we are told later that he goes out after this meal and prays to be spared his fate, his sweat falling as drops of blood to the ground. He, like any one of us called to do something beyond our strength and understanding, has to make an act of will to surrender his life, an act of faith that the God who loves him will make all things well – even though its hard to see how it could all turn out alright.

Next Jesus prays “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.” He turns to the issue of the ones to be left behind, the disciples, and says “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 protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

And that's it. The end.

He has done what was expected. He called disciples, trained disciples, taught the disciples, showed the disciples, loved the disciples. The training is finished.

He establishes the disciples as the ones who have received and embraced Jesus, his way of life, his words, his prayers, and his actions. They have experienced that same Jesus to be the mirror of the love of God, even though they do not really understand much (he never claims they understand). “Protect them,” asks Jesus, “so they be one, as we are one.” And in those few and simple words the disciples become the guardians of the word and the future of all that Jesus has begun.

Can you imagine how terrifying that was for Jesus? He's flying blind at this point. He knows what to do, what is to come, and he is

letting go of everything for which he is giving up his spirit, his prayer, his energy, and finally his life. And he is giving it all into the hands of those who have only the vaguest grasp of what is going on.

How would you feel if you were to be asked to hand over your life's work, your greatest achievement, your deepest desire and vision, to a bunch of confused, and seemingly potential idiots?

But that was exactly what Jesus did.

And that is exactly what Jesus does.

Next Sunday will be the Sunday of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost. It is the gift Jesus promised would aid and help his church to become the sign of hope and love and freedom in God's world. We will wear red, we will celebrate, we will have fun as God wants us to have fun, it is after all the birthday party of the church – but it is well this Sunday to remember that Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples.

In the space between this Sunday and the next we would be well to reflect on what it must have cost Jesus to hand over his work with

no guarantees about what the disciples would do with it. We would do well to think on the great responsibility Jesus put into their hands and now into ours.

For if we are to be the children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, if we are the disciples we gladly became at our baptism, we too are called to be engaged at a very fundamental level with the gospel. We are to be the mirror of God's love in this place, in our homes and in our neighborhoods. We are his disciples whether we are at home or at work. We are disciples in the nation in which we live and in the global community in which we participate. There are no occasions on which we are not disciples.

This week, in the pause between the Ascension and Pentecost we would be well to go to our own upper room and close the door and ask again we be provided with what we need to do the will of God –not what we want but what God wants. We will need to ask for the courage to carry it out. We can eat with friends and over dinner see if they have any sense of what God is asking us to do. We could turn up for prayer each morning and hear what God might be saying to us through the word of scripture. We can listen for God and see God while comforting friends and caring for family and helping those in need.

Above all we can take seriously that Christ is risen from the dead and that means something – and it probably isn't comfortable, and it almost certainly won't be on our terms or even what we want to hear. But it can change the world.

Jesus never promised it would be comfortable, he never said it would be easy, he never said we would not be scared, or even that we would be safe – quite the opposite in fact. But he did encourage us to trust in the love of God just as he entrusted his own life to the love of God – even to giving over the future of his ministry to humble disciples and giving up his own life on the cross.

Because there is resurrection, life does mean something, hope is made real. Through Jesus we have learned we are precious in the eyes of God. So is everyone else and not all have heard that yet and still fewer believe and fewer yet have understood. Everyone needs to hear about that love – and they need to hear it from us not through our words but through our actions. Love wins in the end.

Alleluia.