

## At one

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O God the king of glory,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:  
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,  
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us,  
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour is gone before.

Our text today may be found in the opening two verses from John's gospel:

**'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe  
in me through their word, that they may all be one' (17 v20 - 21)**

Thursday was Ascension Day; next Sunday is Pentecost. Today, between the two, we are like the disciples, paused in a moment in time, waiting for the fulfilment of a promise – the coming of the Holy Spirit. This morning, I want to focus on neither the fact of Jesus' ascension nor the coming of the Holy Spirit but to go back to the very last thing that Jesus shared with his disciples before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and his glorification on the cross.

The meal in the Upper Room has ended. Judas has gone out into the night and Jesus then speaks to his remaining disciples. In John's gospel, there are more than three chapters of exceptional teaching at the end of which we have chapter 17 from which our text today is taken. Jesus is speaking directly to God our

Father with the disciples listening to what he prays. Jesus prays first for himself then for his disciples present and then for us. Bishop Tom Wright translates our text as 'I'm not praying simply for them. I'm praying, too, for the people who will come to believe in me because of their word. I am praying that they may all be one'

This feels like an electric shock. I read the Bible as if it is addressed to me personally. I read it as if what is written there is true and has as much value for me now today as it did to those who heard it or read it for the first time. But what is extraordinary about our gospel passage today is that we are literally being addressed by Jesus – we are the people who have come to faith because of the faithful witness and preaching and writing of Christians who have gone before. The only reason Christianity has survived for two millennia is the fact that people are prepared to pass on the faith to succeeding generations.

And what is the message of our text today – that as Christians we should all be as one, at one, one with the other! Now that seems like wishful-thinking. The old joke about where there are two Jews there are three opinions might be equally true of us as Christians. Not even the Early Church was at one in itself with divisions opening up between believers who believed that followers of the Way must first be Jewish and those who thought circumcision and kosher food laws were redundant. No surprise today then if the Church is richly divided by many major and minor denominations: the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches to name but three.

So how can we cherish and put into effect the earnest prayer of Jesus that we his disciples in the future may be at one with each other ? If not by style of worship or by a purity of doctrine then by love. The bond that unites God the Father with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is the bond of love. And what can and does untie us all as Christians is the love of God which informs our love of our neighbours even as we love ourselves. *Αγάπε* (agape), Christian love, is the bond that unites us regardless of the colour of our skin or the language we normally speak. The word much loved by Hoodies – ‘respect’ – is precisely what Jesus is teaching us to do. We respect each other as Christians because we are all made in the image of God who loves us so we should love him too and love others as if they were mirrors of God himself. On Maundy Thursday, when Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of those twelve young offenders in Casa del Marmo, a prison outside Rome, he was demonstrating as much in a practical visual aid.

My question, then, to you is do we here at St Bart’s pass the test ? Are all welcome to share in our worship and to be present at the Lord’s Table with us ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew’s, Dinard*

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G: Sermon 27 : At one

