

In relationship

8 5 16

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 to leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to comfort us
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before.

The Seventh Sunday of Easter, the Sunday after Ascension Day, and our text this morning may be found in the gospel according to John, chapter 17 and verse 21:

‘As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us . . .’

Good to be back. Great to have a holiday back in London but now I feel refreshed and I'm ready for the summer ahead. And where better to start today's sermon than at the end? The end of Jesus' earthly, embodied ministry when he ascended into heaven to sit on the right hand of God from whence he shall come to judge both the quick and the dead.

And, according to Luke's gospel, when Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples, soon to be apostles, returned to Jerusalem with great joy (23 v 52). Now surely that's counterintuitive – you'd think they be upset at losing Jesus for the second time? But, interestingly, they were happy because of the paradox that is neatly expressed at the end of Matthew's gospel – **‘Lo I am with you always even till the**

end of the world' (28 v 20). They are not alone because Jesus is with them in spirit and memory and there is the prospect of the coming of the Holy Spirit which we will be celebrating here next Sunday.

And it is this idea that we are not alone, that we are in fact in a lively, vital, empowering relationship with the Trinity – with Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that I'd like briefly to consider today through our text :

'As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us . . .'

In chapter 17 of his gospel, Jesus is praying. It is the night of the Last Supper. Jesus has washed the disciples' feet; they have sat down to eat; Judas has got up and gone out into the night to betray Jesus. But before they leave the Upper Room to go out to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus will be arrested and taken off to be tried and executed, Jesus talks to our Father. Jesus prays first for himself, then for the disciples and finally, surprisingly, for us here and now – the people who will come to believe in Jesus because of the witness of the apostles, Christians throughout the ages until Jesus comes again.

And what Jesus prays for is our relationship with God. One of the challenges of John's gospel is the idea that we should abide in the Father just as the Son abides in the Father and the Father in the Son – it's what the picture of the true vine in chapter 15 is all about. To abide essentially means to remain with, to be with, to stay with, to continue to live with. To abide is to be in a relationship of love, mirroring the flow of love from one to other and outwards by how we treat other folk whom we meet daily in our everyday lives.

And that is our true vocation as Christians: to continue the task of trying to make known the possibility of a divine relationship, a divine connection, a divine way of life that will make the world a better place by acknowledging, by recognising the reality of a loving God who was born a boy, died a man, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and will one day return in glory.

So the essence of my sermon today is simply this – that God loves us and wants us to love him and if we do, then we will be so much the better and the world a much better place.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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