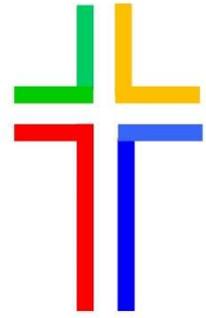


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 24 May



Some aspects of life are beginning to return to a sort of normal, but it is clear that many other activities will be affected by the covid-19 pandemic for a long time to come. The slowing down of life should have given most people more space and time for spiritual contemplation. Let us hope that it has, and that the return to busyness does not snuff this out.

PRAYER

The first disciples met together in fellowship and to listen to the teachings of Jesus. Although we cannot meet we know that we are still in fellowship with you, O Lord, and that we can still learn from the teachings of Jesus. Be with us, we pray, as we read and reflect on this service in our own homes, and

celebrate all that Jesus has done for us. Help us to truly listen to your call, and to respond with changed lives and a new determination to follow your ways. We ask this through and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen

READING FOR TODAY John 17:1-11 (NIV)

Jesus prays for his disciples

¹After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed:

‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed

your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

REFLECTION

This Gospel reading occurs immediately before the arrest of Jesus and so therefore takes place when Jesus was gathered together with his disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus prays first of all for himself, and then for his disciples. He thanks God for the disciples and says that they now know everything they should. He then, in verse 11, prays for their protection.

At first sight you might think he is asking for their physical protection, that they will be kept safe from misfortunes, illnesses, and evil acts by other people. But we know, with the benefit of hindsight, that probably every person in that room died a martyr’s death. In the light of this, just how effective were these prayers?

We nearly always think in terms of physical protection, of healing, of safety of those travelling, of those engaged in risky occupations. But Jesus was thinking of their spiritual protection not their physical protection. He is praying that they will be kept safe from temptation, that they should not stray from the truth of the gospel, that they should be protected by their faith and trust in Jesus.

Just at this moment we hear a lot about risk assessments with respect to the coronavirus, what precautions have to be taken to keep carers free of the virus, what equipment is needed to protect teachers returning to school, what distance from another person is safe. But maybe alongside physical risk assessments we should be doing spiritual risk assessments.

Jesus focused on the spiritual safety of his disciples in this prayer. And we need to follow his example. We need to maintain our active faith, we need to pray, we need to read scripture regularly, we need to love our neighbours, we need to trust Jesus. This is the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that will keep us safe spiritually.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

We bring before you all world leaders and people in authority at this difficult time. Be with them and guide them as they try to make the best decisions for everyone.

We think of Church leaders through this period when congregations cannot meet. Help them as they maintain or develop new methods of fellowship and communication.

We think of all those who are suffering from the virus and help us to remember that there are many other diseases and deprivations that still exist alongside it. Be with all those who are ill or undernourished or in want of food or clean water, and with all those who are caring or helping.

We think of our own friends, families, and neighbours and ask that during this time of isolation all are helped to maintain their spiritual protection.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN StF 351

(One of the tunes on the CD distributed a couple of weeks ago)

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

BLESSING

The LORD bless you and keep you.
The LORD make his face to shine on you,
and be gracious to you;
The LORD turn his face toward you,
and give you peace. Amen.

"The scriptures hold the keys to spiritual protection", Boyd K Packer.