

Bennochy church 13th may 2018

The passage in John 17 is one that speaks of an intimate relationship. The prayer of Jesus is a prayer for protection for his friends. The dilemma for Jesus is this, he knows, that in a very short while, he will be arrested and executed. He will no longer be in the world, but his disciples will be. Without him, how will they cope? As their rabbi, there is here this natural instinct, desire, to protect his followers. Jesus is going to have to let them go. To loosen his grasp and let them walk on their own two feet.

Jesus has done his best to prepare them. They had the unique experience of being his companion on the way. Witness to his words, parables, miracles and the way he challenged the religious authorities and said to all who would listen, the Kingdom of God is here. He only had three short years, to do all this. And remember, the future of the embryonic Christian faith, is going to depend on these 11 men. So no pressure!

I do wonder, just how much of this passage, if read back to those original disciples, at that time, they would actually understand. They are in the moment and this passage was written many decades later. Events are moving quickly. Out with their control. They are being dragged along, to it inevitable conclusion. Life without Jesus.

This is John's reflection, and I think it is very different from the reality of those original 11 men, just before the crucifixion of Jesus. In a real sense, these words, this prayer, was not actually for them, but those future generations who would later on read these words.

In this passage, there are here some key theological points that John wants to get over to his readers. The most important is this, the end is only the beginning. What would seem like a full stop, would become an unending story. To the disciples it would not feel like that. Not till later. It was important for Jesus, in this prayer, to say, once I have gone, God will still protect.

You need to dig into the rest of John's discourse to understand what lies behind the words of Jesus. And that is, the promise of the Holy Spirit, still to come. According to John, Jesus has already spoken to his disciples about this.

In John 14, Jesus says this, *"When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you."* (John 14: 18-20) That is the future protection that Jesus says is promised to them.

This is hugely important. It is the heart of what faith is all about. It is in direct contrast to the image of Thomas placing his hand in

the wound of Christ. Remember the words of Jesus, *"Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"* (John 20:29) How do you see? By the presence of God who is unseen.

We need to believe that this prayer of protection, is also for us. We will never touch the wounds of Christ, but we do have the spirit of Jesus, that is the promise, to be our example and our strength.

I wonder who in life has been your inspiration? This idea that the spirit of an individual lives on and inspires us. Churchill's famous speech to the commons on 4th June 1940, we are not going to give up. You know the bit, *"We will fight them on the beaches..."*. Mahatma Ghandi, who advocated resisting violence, by peaceful action. Here is a great quote, *"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."* And he did!" My favourite inspiration, Martin Luther King, he was far from perfect, but he put his life on the line, and was prepared to act against racial injustice. There are so many quotes to choose from. He said, *"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."*

Inspiration is not just the domain of the famous. Think of people who have overcome great adversity in life. Those who are generous with their time helping others, seeking no other

reward. People who live with a life limiting illnesses and say, *'You know what, I am living for today'.*

I have met so many people, who look back and wonder how they ever survived their loss, their pain, those big black holes of life, and have said to me, without my faith I don't know if I would have got through that.

That is the protection of God. It is not always something we can define, but we know it when it has happened. In John 17, it is the desire of Jesus. In that moment, he is focused only on his friends and what will happen to them.

We cannot stop the world and get off. Life is not like that. God does not protect us by isolating us from the pain of humanity. We share that pain, as we seek to serve our communities and journey with the cross of Christ on our backs.

Christian Aid believes *"in life before death"*. In a sense protecting others, by giving a voice to the powerless, calling for equality for all, irrespective of age, gender, race or sexual orientation, and by speaking a clarion call for justice into the world. Surely that is our prayer as well.

The world is one. May we be inspired, by those where less is more, and where people, by the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, put their trust and their hope in God. Amen.