

Followers Of The Way

Ancient Discipleship For Modern Christians

“Pursue Unity”

Emma King

John 17:20-26 Jesus' prayer for unity.

As you all know, I am very much a visual person. When I read things, I like to visualise myself being in that place, sometimes being in amongst it, sometimes just looking at what is going on.

This bible reading is one of those times...

Jesus knows what's coming, he knows that he is just about to be betrayed and arrested. He knows it's going to be barbaric, he knows there is nothing more he can do to prepare his disciples before the next chapter.

So what does he do.... He does what we all do in times that are hard... he prays!

I love to visualise being there when Jesus sits and thinks, when all else fails...
pray!

He prays for God to glorify him, he prays for his disciples, and he prays for all believers as we have had in our reading today.

But I personally think that the first two verses are so important.

V20 – My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. –

Here Jesus is praying for the people who are yet to believe. The ones who he has called the disciples to tell about him. He knows that there will be more to come, that this is not the end.

V21 – That all of them may be one.

That they may all be one. To be united. Not divided. But united.

This week, I had to do the weekly reflection for the hospital service that goes out on the radio. I was reflecting on the greatest commandment – Love your neighbour as I have loved you.

But it got me thinking, What truly is a neighbour?

Is it just the people we see when we leave for work, putting the bins out, stopping for a chat on the pavement outside the house?

A neighbour in the bible is defined as a “friend” or “other”. Basically, it is everyone.

Meaning when Jesus was praying for unity, he was praying for everyone. When he commands us to love our neighbour, he calls us to love everyone!

But this isn't always an easy task is it?

Simon Reed talks in his book about how divided the world is at the moment... and gives the examples of Race, Religion, nationality, politics, class, gender and sexuality. We see it on the news every single day. We see it on our streets. We see it in our churches.

Simon says, "More than ever, a divided world needs a united church if the healing message of Jesus is going to be taken seriously"

Before I went on holiday, I went to Wells to go on a course titled "Making peace with conflict" I will confess that I was a little grumpy about it as I had been to Wells the day before for something very similar, and I just thought that it would be very samey and I moaned about it all the way down.

But what I came away with was much different. I came away with a feeling of hope. A feeling of if we just put what Jesus tells us to do, rather than our own agenda. We might just have a peace within us.

Simon Keyes, who ran the course, told us that the art of having peace in conflict, in those times when we disagree, is having the art of forgiveness. And he uses three dimensions for this.

1. **Humility** – Its not all about us, even though we make think it is. Blaming people in anger is toxic.
2. Repentance – Are we willing to repair or restore, even if we don't fully agree. But to do it to keep community together.
3. Forgiveness itself – Letting go of the desire for revenge – The Lords prayer that we speak every single week says For us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us... lets not hold a grudge against each other.

Jesus says we should forgive someone seventy times seven in response to a question from Peter about how many times to forgive a brother who sins against him. Peter asks if forgiving seven times is appropriate, and Jesus responds “not seven times, but seventy times seven”

So here is All Saints, what kind of community do we want to be?

What Christian principles are important to us here?

Christians are called to be peacemakers, displaying to the world the miracle of unity in diversity and the fruits of the spirit of, Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

The reality is that we won't always agree on things, we might be divided in our views on LLF or if the church pews should stay or go.

But Jesus calls us to be united. Jesus is the rock on which our foundations are built upon.

We are called to love each other, forgive each other, expect nothing in return from each other, walk along side each other, and pray for each other.

Let's not be a community that people look in at and see a house divided by anger, blame and pain because we can't except each other.

Let's be a community that is committed to

1. Praying for each other – especially when we disagree
2. Show compassion for each other – Especially when we mess up
3. And listen to each other – And be tolerant of each other

In Verse 26 Jesus prays “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Lets be a community that people see the love and peace of Christ flowing out of us like a river, and encourage them to come and ride the wave with us.

I love how Simon Reed finishes this chapter...

“To grow as a Christian, to be a disciple of Christ, is ultimately about becoming more fully human. Part of the process is learning to see that which is of God in every other human being, no matter how different from us they may be.”

And I would add, its about our willingness to unite in Love.