

Easter 7 Sunday after Ascension John 17:1-11

An ancient legend tells of Jesus' ascension into heaven. He is met by the angel Gabriel who asks him, "Now that your work is finished, what plans have you made to ensure that the truth you brought to earth will spread throughout the world?"

Jesus answered, "I called some fishermen and tax-collectors to walk along with me as I did my Father's will." "Yes, I know about them," said Gabriel, "but what other plans have you made?"

Jesus replied, "I taught Peter, James and John about the kingdom of God; I taught Thomas about faith; and all of them were with me as I healed and preached to the multitudes." Gabriel began to lose patience. "Really now, all this is well and good, but surely you must have other plans to make sure your work was not in vain." Jesus fixed Gabriel with a steady gaze and said with finality, "I have no other plans. I am depending on them!!"

We know this is a legend but it makes sense to us, Jesus seems to have entrusted the foundation of his Church and the continuation of his teaching and preaching to a real rag-bag of people, all of whom were flawed and by their witness and example the Gospel message was to be spread throughout the world. It is little wonder that the disciples were fearful although the miracle of the resurrection had made them also joyful.

This morning we consider the ascension of Jesus, that moment where Christ commissions his disciples to continue God's work in the world. The reading we heard from Acts emphasises that they would not be alone in their task, that the Holy Spirit would come and they should wait for their gift, their baptism by the Holy Spirit.

The reading from the Gospel is a part of Jesus' prayer in which he talks openly with the Father about the task which lay before the disciples. They were not simply to live wonderful lives in the knowledge of the love of God that they had learned through Jesus, they were to share that knowledge and continue to live in community following the example of Jesus.

Jesus calls on God to protect the disciples. He states very clearly that this prayer is not for the world, but particularly for the faithful. Jesus saw the time was coming when he would no longer be around to guide and direct his followers by word and example, he knew the disciples understood that Jesus and the Father were one even if they couldn't explain it, and now Jesus was getting them ready for what was to come.

If the disciples felt unsettled, confused or even fearful, that is hardly surprising. To have given up your life to follow this incredible man only to be told that now that man is leaving and you have to continue alone, is enough to unsettle anyone. But particularly at the ascension, these disciples had been through so much. When Jesus prayed the prayer we heard in the Gospel reading the disciples could hardly have imagined what was to come. By the time they witnessed the ascension, they would have questioned everything they even thought they knew. A dead man raised, walking amongst them, only to have to say goodbye again.

We can only hope that the words of this prayer from some weeks before began now to make sense, and that the disciples knew some comfort from them. We know that

they did, indeed, go on to minister in community with one another and spread the Gospel far and wide. When they disagreed, they found commonality and unity just as Jesus had prayed they would. Their views and opinions about all sorts of things were challenged and changed as they navigated this new world without Jesus. But they were able to do it because they were never really alone. They did it not in their own strength or out of their own desires, but because they submitted to God's call and were obedient to it.

So we need not worry about whether or not we are worthy of our faith, God calls whom he wills, we never choose, we are chosen, and we are richly blessed by God when we receive his grace. We need not worry about the difficulties we face, it has always been so and we will never walk alone in faith.

The Lord knows what he's doing, he managed to establish a worldwide church with a big mouthed fisherman, a tax collector, a doubter, a couple of ambitious brothers and a few others. We have our part to play in God's kingdom, even if we struggle to understand what it is, God knows and he set us apart to do it. We can rejoice in that and, like the disciples, share it with courage, we too can go and make disciples of all nations, our words and actions in faith are all God needs to make it happen, he does the rest!