

## SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Week of Prayer for Reconciliation (27 May-3 June)

28 May, 2006

1. **Prayer was such an important part of Jesus' life** that his disciples begged him to teach them to pray. The synoptic gospels show him going apart for prayer to the wilderness and other quiet places, and praying in the garden before his death. John's gospel (John 17.6-19) devotes chapters to Jesus' prayer for his disciples. Jesus showed them the intimate relationship which existed between him and the Father. (Abba = Daddy) He taught that that same relationship is available to all God's children. So this intimate relationship is the first foundation of Christian prayer.
2. **The second foundation is that God is the transcendent** Lord of history and creator of the world and that his will for the world is good and just and true. So these two characteristics of God—transcendent and personal—come together in our minds as we offer our prayer that we submit to his will recognizing our direct relationship with him (*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done*) and so we come in adoration, confession, thanksgiving and praise.
3. **Jesus prayed for his disciples** "Keep them safe .that they may be one just as you and I are one...[May they] have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness... Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth." Too often Christian denominations see themselves as competitors for people's allegiance, failing to recognize fellow disciples also seeking to find the mind of Christ and do the Father's will. In this Week of Prayer for Unity we need to give thanks for all those churches who seek the truth of God, recognize the particular gifts they bring in his service, confess our failure always to value them, and pray for their faithful witness in the world.
4. **Our unity with other Christians** may never be structural unity; the plurality of Christian churches creates a rich tapestry. But tapestry is made by the weaving complementary colours. into a pattern of Such can be the Christian churches, complementing each other, woven together intimately to become the one picture of praise and adoration, thanksgiving, and intercession for all those things in the world which need to be reconciled to him, our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

7 May, 2006

1. **Psalms 23, the most loved of the Psalms** spells out with rich imagery of the Good Shepherd: the one who fulfils all my needs, who is constantly with me regardless of the dangers and fears I face, who heals my hurts, who provides for me all my life, loving, feeding, guiding, and protecting. It is a very personal ministry relationship. Notice how it begins objectively—"The Lord...he" and then changes to a You/me.
2. John 10.11-18 **adds a community dimension.** The Good Shepherd was prepared to give his life for his flock, for sheep coming from Jewish and gentile backgrounds, called together to be one flock under the one shepherd -a picture of harmony, unity and love.
3. **A key line in the gospel is v. 17:** The Father loves Jesus because of his sacrificial offering of himself, which can only lead to life. The Shepherd becomes the sacrificial lamb, an image which evokes ideas of offering, obedience, thanksgiving, death and atonement.
4. **The Letters of John seem to be by the same author.** It is not surprising, therefore, that the message of the Shepherd's love resonates through the letters. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us". The implications of this for us:? We ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who does not help someone in need? Herein lies the summary of the law, the basis for our servant action in the world, the underpinning of our welfare agencies, and development plans by our mission agencies. It is not justification by good works, it is a consequence of Christ's sacrificial love and our growth in christlikeness.
5. **The fullness of this imagery points to much that we need to understand about ourselves as the flock of Christ,** both in its universal dimensions and in its manifestation in each little congregation in the Diocese. No matter what the background of each Christian our unity is based on his calling of and our response. He loves each of us and the flock. His sacrifice has given us life and we are called to give sacrificially in our lives.. In truth and action each 'flock' of Christians needs to look out for the poor and needy, for the hungry and homeless, for those in need of guidance and healing. We need to spread tables before them, guide them in right pathways, pour oil on their wounds and bring them into our fellowship so that they might also dwell in his house forever. Ministry is relational. It is based on the I/you relationship.— personal. loving and sacrificial. Is this true of our mission?

**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**  
**14 May, 2006**

1. ***The Bold and the Beautiful, Days of Our Lives*** and similar soaps have love as a constant theme—we speak of falling in love and out of love; people talk about once loving and no longer loving; of lacking love and being loveless. This fickle love must be a different love from that in today's New Testament reading.
2. God is love. (1 John 4.7-21) the simplest expression of the nature of God; a great mystery. The passage uses the word *love* so much that it can be confusing to listen to. Here is what it says about love: i. Love comes from God, ii. Everyone who ever loves someone else knows God through that love iii. God loved us before we loved him iv. God loves us so much he sent Jesus to reveal that love through his sacrificial death and so that we might live through him v. If we love one another God lives in us and that love is perfected in us. Quite a philosophical passage.
3. **Love abides, dwells, stays for a long time**, and that love has its origin in God. In John 15.1-8 we hear the same word *abide*: Jesus said, Abide in me as I abide in you; you cannot bear fruit unless you abide in me etc. The image of the vine aids our understanding. The life-giving sap of the vine produces branch after fruit-bearing branch, fruitful only as long as the branch remains as part of the vine.
4. **The vine metaphor continues** when we speak of baptism as being 'grafted' into Christ. In baptism we become a branch of the vine, the life-giving sap of love flows always from the vine giving life and blossom and fruit. Our source of strength comes from God through Jesus Christ; we are all branches together, leafing, flowering and fruiting on the one vine, bearing fruit in season. All this says something about ministry. There are no "lone branches", a branch needs the whole vine in order to flourish and bear fruit.
5. **A proper response to the love of God is to love one another.** If we are true fruit of the vine, then love becomes the lifeblood, the ruling principle in our lives. We will live in union with God, and the fruit we bear will be a testimony of God's love in us. If there is no love in our hearts and actions to others then our claim to love God is a lie. God's love is not fickle. It is a constant source of life, a rich provision for growth, a sending force for mission.

**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**  
**21 MAY, 2006**

1. **If we accept that Jesus is the saviour of the world we become children of God**, We confirmed this in our baptism wherein we became 'a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of heaven'. Our membership of Christ is the basis of our adoption as children of God. It is a matter of consequence that as children loving the Father then we must also love his other children who are loved by him, just as he loves us. This great mystery of love is possible only through Jesus, and only if Jesus is the Saviour of the world.
2. **1 John 5.1-12 testifies to the truth of Jesus by presenting three witnesses.** One, the Spirit testifies to the truth of Jesus as the Son of God. We remember the evidence of Jesus' words and miracles. The kingdom of God became a reality in the person of Jesus. When he spoke demons obeyed. When he touched, healing came. When he spoke, he spoke with authority and truth. We know the reality of these things today: Jesus' healing touch, Jesus' soothing words. Two, at his Baptism in the waters of the Jordan the voice of God was heard testifying to his Sonship. John testified that he saw the Spirit descending like a dove. His experience of that confirmed Jesus' identity to him. Three, the blood of Christ's death testifies to his Sonship and the power of God to overcome evil for that death led to resurrection and new life.
3. **We have three similar witnesses in our own life** One, our baptism - our own entering into the child/parent relationship with God; two, our receiving the Spirit in baptism leads us to an active ministry; and three, our reception of the sacrament by which we enter into the power of the cross and the grace to persevere in our ministry. Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry—three witnesses in our own lives and three witnesses for the Church of what it means to be Christian. All three are sacraments, i.e., outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual truth of our salvation through Jesus. ("for service ,too, is sacrament" AHB 453)
4. **Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry:** the three are intertwined witnesses to the world of our identity as children of God. How does the wider community see us and our Church? Do they see us as a 'holy huddle' or 'church club', or do they really see the branches of the vine reaching out into the community, bearing fruit i.e. being a visible presence in the community, listening to those in need of a friendly ear, supporting those who are weak, visiting the shut-ins, building up the esteem of those who feel bad? Is our love of the Father really extended to loving all his other children too?