

Trinity: Love that never ends:

#2 Trinity and mission

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Intro

My previous sermon back in March was the week before shutdown in Victoria. It was live streamed, but I was still speaking mainly to people in pews. It was a fairly typical sermon for me so far as structure goes. I did some talking, there were group chats, and interactive group feedback online.

Do you have any idea how hard preparing today's talk was for me?

Where's my group chats? Where's my online quiz or word cloud?

Not to mention, what's with me having to do all the work!

I admit, I thought about getting fancy and embedding a Q&A in the PowerPoint, and then I thought. Really Dianne! You're live streaming. If they've got a device handy they can post their comments and questions. We're not exactly disconnected. Between Facebook, YouTube, live chat, Zoom dinners and study groups, WhatsApp, and plain old email, there's plenty of ways for you to join in and engage, so go for it. Steve can look at it all later.

Today we're looking at John 17 and Jesus's 'farewell prayer'. Let's dive straight into the text because there's a bit to get our heads around in this fistful of verses.

John chapter 17 focussing on verses 1-3 and then jumping to 20-26. I'll focus on the things John highlights in his text – the setting, the action and the outcomes.

The setting is part of a long discourse between Jesus and his disciples at the end of that fateful, final Passover meal. Jesus is preparing his followers for what is to come, not just his death and resurrection but the coming of the Holy Spirit. He will give them peace and they are to 'take courage' because of what Jesus has achieved through his time on earth.

Jesus prays

And then, Jesus prays. We know from the gospels that Jesus prays, but this is the longest record we have of what and how he prayed.

Here, Jesus is praying aloud and it is intentional his disciples can hear his prayer. The disciples aren't eavesdropping. It isn't private prayer like he talks about in Matthew 6 when he admonishes hypocritical praying out loud that glorifies the prayer and not God. Nor is it 'leading in prayer' although when you pray this chapter out loud (and I encourage you to do that this week), there are hints that perhaps John used it in his churches to lead congregational praying. But here, in his gospel, John and the other disciples are hearing Jesus pray this prayer for the first time.

... [Jesus] looked up to heaven [a Jewish prayer attitude like we would close our eyes] and said, 'Father, the hour has come; [Jesus has completed everything he came into the world to do except the final act of salvation] glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you. Jesus prays that his obedience to the Father in this hour will bring glory to God. It also acknowledges the incarnation, Jesus emptied himself of heavenly glory; he is anticipating the completion of his work on earth and the resumption of his glory... you have given him authority over all people, [referring to his divine authority] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

There's a link to chapter 3 here where Jesus tells Nicodemus that people love darkness and hate light and so God sends his Son to, as the NIV commentary puts it, "participate in our decision to come to the light". And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. We learn that eternal life comes through knowing God, but also through knowing Jesus Christ his Son. Not "Steve, meet God. Oh yeah. And this is his Son Jesus" Not even an intellectual knowing. But a knowing that encompasses experience and commitment and intimacy as well as love for and obedience to God.

Goggleboxing the Trinity

[seem like strange segue, bear with me]. One of my guilty pleasures is Gogglebox. Who would have thought watching people watch TV would be so much fun? The absolute genius of the show (aside from, I don't have to watch MAFS or MKR) is that you really feel you get to know these people and the relationship dynamics and genuine affection for each other in each group.

One of the couples happen to barrack for the same footy team I do, and I occasionally see them at a game. It is astonishing, firstly how authentic they are, and secondly how graciously they handle random strangers coming up to them and talking to them as though they know everything about them.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is a little bit like that. We get to see the intimacy, the regard and the relationship of the Tri-une God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Throughout the chapter Jesus builds a picture of closeness between the Father and the Son, of a commitment to the plan of salvation, a sharing of effort and of glory. *You Father, are in me and I am in you...*

Now, you might say what about the Holy Spirit, where's the 3rd person of the Trinity in this closeness and one-ness? From the rest of John's gospel, particularly chapters 14 and 20, we know that John has a trinitarian theology and that the essence of the Trinity is relational and self-giving. And the Father and Son send the Spirit to unite us to God.

People matter to God

This is the next thing we learn. People matter to God. The plan of salvation is to bring people into relationship with God. To make that happen, the Son empties himself of glory, dwells among us, teaches, heals, expresses God's kingdom in the world. Jesus' prayer tells us that God's actions in salvation flow from who he is eternally – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Look back to verse 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

From the time of Abraham, God called out his people to be witnesses to him through the way they lived as a community. To be a blessing and to live as God wants them to. In the Old Testament we see this meets with mixed success.

But now God has sent his Son to bring people out of darkness. In verses 9-19 Jesus prays specifically for the apostles, those whom he called to follow him and participate in his ministry and mission on earth. The ones he's about to leave, but who will receive the Holy Spirit as advocate and comforter. He knows they're facing grief, doubt, persecution. He prays, not that God would take them out of the world, but that he would protect them from evil in the world. Historically, it could all have ended with Jesus' death. The disciples would face ridicule, but they could go back to their day jobs. Jesus of Nazareth would be a footnote of history.

Verses 20-26 tell us why it didn't play out that way. In this prayer that Jesus prayed over 2000 years ago, we find that we, and all believers, before and to come, are included in this prayer. And not just in the prayer but in the work of making God known.

vs 20 I ask not only on behalf of these [the apostles], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word [includes us], that they may all be one (with each other and with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Where do I get the idea that our one-ness includes being one with God? Vs 21 As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. It's the, 'so that' which brings us on to why it didn't just end with Jesus' death and his followers going home to get on with fishing.

Spread the word

The reaction of the apostles to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus was not to hoard it for themselves. It was such good news they simply had to share it. To let others know about this amazing good news of love, hope and eternal life. And in doing that, they (and we) live out this prayer that Jesus prayed. Let's take another look.

Those who will believe in me through their word...so that the world may believe you have sent me...so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

The purpose of mission is not to give a history lesson. The mission is so others can get to know God, and to 'make God known'.

God makes himself known in the church and through the church as we grow in the spirit of wisdom and knowledge of God. Through us God extends the invitation for others to know him so that knowledge of him might multiply across the world.

And so, as a community who know and love God, we look for ways we can let those who don't know God come into God's kingdom and also know and love God. Sometimes we make God known in personal ways – through care, love, attention, compassion, generosity, prayer.

Sometimes we make God known as a community – public worship, preaching, praying, openness about who we are, reaching out, trying to address injustice, inequality and need. There are times it feels easy, and other times it's a hard slog.

One thing I find interesting from the New Testament is that it's not about numbers. Sure, numbers are quoted, but they're not the purpose. The purpose is always about God being glorified. Someone answering a question (like Phillip) or supporting a community (like Paul). Communities trying to be a new humanity formed in diversity and unity, reflecting the image of God. The stories are always about relationships formed and nurtured between those who do believe and those who don't yet.

When I was preparing for this talk, I was very aware of how easy it is to over-complicate it. And doing so is death to engagement. Trying to explain Trinity shaped mission by talking about the eternal ontological relationships within the Trinity would likely have the same effect as me talking about the riveting aspects of my work like the irrevocability of payments and their attendant liability flows. There, see, I felt that! You zoned out and started thinking about [coffee/dinner]. (And I don't blame you)

We get better at mission, at sharing the good news, when we're willing to engage and when we're willing to ask and be asked. It's that verse from 1Peter 3:15 Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect". I think sometimes we think we have to have the right answers. I liked the way one of

the commentators I listened to this week put it “We’re not called to debate and destroy. We’re called to truth, love, hope and joy.” That’s what we have to share; the good news of Jesus Christ

Conclusion

This prayer of Jesus tells us of the God who has saved us, who knows us completely, who loves us completely and calls us to share his love to the world, making him known so that others will know him too. That’s our aim. The goal of Christian mission. Re-forming a humanity that displays God’s image in love and unity. Bringing believers into a personal relationship with the tri-une God. Bringing them into relationship with each other that reflects the one-ness of the Trinity; united in a diverse, loving, mutually honouring relationship. Glorifying God.

May you display God’s image in love and unity this week.