

## 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Easter 7: John 17,1-7,20-23 – ‘That they may be one...’

Let's ask ourselves a cheeky question for a few moments: if Jesus was to visit earth for a while this year, which church would he join? Would he be a charismatic or a Catholic, an evangelical or a liberal? Is he secretly an Anglican or a Baptist or a Pentecostal? Would his requirements be very specific? Where we used to live in Clapham Junction, we regularly walked past a church called, and I kid you not: 'The Ransom African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church'. Now there's a church whose name is its doctrinal statement. The pastor must need to have extra large pockets sewn into all their trousers to fit their business cards.

I'm sure most of us will be thinking two answers to my question. The one we'll say aloud with a beatific smile on our face is: 'Jesus would be happy to join lots of churches.' The one we'll be thinking is: 'but I'm sure he'd prefer my church to the other lot round here.' And from one perspective that's fine. To be honest, if we don't think Jesus would join our church we're in the wrong church.

But although we joke about it, there's a real issue here. On one level, a huge movement like the church is going to have lots of faces, and we should celebrate that. On the other hand, the fragmentation and divisions should make us weep. It's not what Jesus planned – look at what he prays in our passage for today – 'That they may be one, as we are one.' Jesus loves *diversity*, but not division. His desire is for us to be *one*.

Those of you who have recently joined us for worship may not know that we are an ecumenical church. What that means is that several types of church – Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Reformed and Catholic – have partnered together to be one church. It's our little way of saying that what divides us is *way* less than what unites us. We will all disagree over some stuff, but being together as one community of Jesus is much more important.

And today's passage reminds me why I want to be a minister leading that kind of church. It's what Jesus wants for us. We might not always do it very well, and I'm sure there's loads I could do better, but as best we can we're trying to be faithful to what Jesus prayed for us.

Since our buildings closed, a rather amazing thing has happened. Not only have we got lots more of us joining for these online services, we are now spread all over the world. Today, I know there will be people joining us from Australia, Canada, France, as well as all over the UK – Wales, Devon, Hartlepool, East Anglia, Poole, Kent and no doubt lots of other places besides. And I'm thrilled about that – if you live outside MK, can I say a special 'hello' to you, it's great that you're with us! And that's not just because it's nice having lots of us – it's because of what Jesus prays. I want to say to all of you: Jesus loves having *you* as part of his community. He wanted all of us to be one, a community of love which in turn reflects his love to the world.

But Jesus is not a hippy, despite how the films of the 60s and 70s showed him. This is not some wishy-washy 'love is all you need' type of message. It is based supremely in one act. Glorify your Son Jesus prays, and what he means is: Glorify him as he gives his life on a cross. This is how we know what love is, St John reflects elsewhere – Jesus laid down his life for us. True love is selfless service: and as Jesus loved us, so we offer that to each other and to the world.

As we gather today to share bread and wine across the world. Let's celebrate that we are one; but let's also remember that this one-ness calls us to offer ourselves for the good of others, wherever we are. Then the world will know that God sent Jesus and has loved us, even as God loved him. Amen.