

Date: 19/4/19
Occasion: Good Friday
Service: Meditation

Reading: John 17.19 – 26

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. 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. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent 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.'

Jesus prayed that we may all be one. All too often this has been understood as wishing for some kind of improved cooperation between organisations that have at some point in their lives all claimed exclusive ownership of the truth.

The truth is that none of us own the truth;

The truth is that mere membership of something is only the beginning of what it means to be a child of God.

Yesterday evening, at the Liturgy of the Last Supper, we commemorated, with millions of other Christians, a remarkable expression of what it means to live as God would have us live: I mean, of course, John's account of Jesus washing his friends' feet as they prepared for the meal we remember as the last Supper. In a little while, at the Liturgy of the Passion, among other acts of veneration and thanksgiving, we will hear John's account of the final hours of Jesus' life.

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Between these comes the passage I have just read. It is part of what is known as the farewell discourse, in which we learn about the absolute centrality of Jesus to any encounter with the reality we know as God. His words are simultaneously deeply compelling and challenging almost to the point of impossibility.

Compelling because they speak of the intimacy of acceptance, and rejoicing in the other that can only come the deepest, most powerful love.

Challenging because they speak of the intimacy of acceptance and delight in the other that can only come from the deepest, most powerful love.

The attraction of Jesus and the challenge of discipleship are inescapably bound up with each other and today is the day – of all days in the year, in the history of human yearning – when we have little choice but to face these challenges head on.

If we can get through the day without looking away, we will have achieved something worthwhile.

If we can get through the day without looking away, we will have made a few faltering steps on a journey where there is no me and you, no us and them, no insiders and outsiders, only sisters and brothers.