

Seventh Sunday of Easter 2018 (13.05.18)

Acts 1: 15 – 17, 21 – end; John 17: 6 – 19

We're in the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost. That's why we're praying Thy Kingdom Come. It's why there are all these Thy Kingdom Come prayer activities both here and across town – well, in fact across the world. It's because the disciples spent the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit.

So in this period of ten days we're placing an especial emphasis on praying and we're waiting. It's all about waiting for the next Sunday if you like, waiting for Pentecost, waiting for the Holy Spirit. And our Gospel reading, during this period of waiting for the Spirit, is from John 17. It always is, every year. Not always the precise verses we've heard today. Today we've had the middle section of John 17. Next year we'll have the final section. And the year after that we'll have the first section that precedes what we've heard today. But

the curious thing about John 17, about the Gospel readings we have as we wait for the Holy Spirit, is that John 17 doesn't mention the Holy Spirit! It's all about Jesus and his Father. It's all about Christian believers being incorporated into Jesus just as he is in his Father. It's about being in Christ. But I suppose it's sort of implicit in that that this happens through the operation of the Holy Spirit. In fact the clue is in the final verse of the reading when Jesus prays that Christian believers may be "sanctified in truth." It's pretty difficult to think of being sanctified in the truth other than in terms of the Holy Spirit.

And what Christian believers are sanctified for is to be sent into the world. People may well have heard me go on about this from this pulpit before, but worship is like a heartbeat: we're gathered in to be sent out. If you've been prepared for Confirmation by me, or been taught for worship leading by me on a Recognised Parish Assistants' course – and I'll be doing one in a few weeks' time in Scarborough, so I'll be on my hobby

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

horse again – you will know the emphasis I place on the way that worship propels us out into lives of service. The last words of the Communion service are “GO in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

The word Mass comes from the Latin that means to be sent. When we use the word Mass to describe Holy Communion or the Eucharist, we do so because Mass is the service *from which we are dismissed*. I know we associate the word with Roman Catholicism, but why let the Romans have all the best words? We come here to be dismissed. We celebrate the Mass.

And what we're sent into, what we're dismissed into, the mission we're entrusted with, is our Monday to Saturday lives. In 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England considered a report called “Setting God's People Free” and this was cascaded down and considered by the York diocesan Synod in March 2018. The report's stated purpose is to “seek effective ways to build up the whole people of God, with a confident

faith and vision for the Kingdom of God, which is lived out in homes, schools, communities and places of work.” It got me terribly excited and threw me back to an earlier report to General Synod in 1985 entitled “All are Called.” I had simply devoured that as a student in the mid-1980s wrestling with my vocation. It helped me get my head round but also, more importantly, inhabit a sense of vocation which broke down the distinction between the sacred and the secular, which grasped the all-encompassing scope of the gospel and which, in all probability, postponed my ordination by about 15 years. And you might say that when I was ordained it marked a breakdown of my confidence in that vocation and a retreat into the security of churchiness. Because vocation isn't about floating about being religious: it's about getting on with the lives into which each one of us is dismissed from our worship.

Frankly I was disappointed by the debate of “Setting God's People Free” in the Diocesan Synod. It was

marked by a poverty of theological imagination. Not only in the groups into which we split, but also in the presentation of the report, people seemed only able to think of Monday to Saturday ministry in terms of having opportunities to talk to people about their faith. It reduced Christianity into something that was nothing other than talking about Jesus. The contexts in which people lived their lives were merely incidental as the back drop to the opportunities to have pastoral conversations when the occasion arose or to be known and seen as a person of prayer. There was no attempt to have a theological understanding of those contexts, or to be interested in asking where God was in the actual stuff they were doing Monday to Saturday. And that's what we need to do if we are going to pray Thy Kingdom Come and be sanctified in the truth.

Now, of course, that's easier for some contexts than others. It's easy if you're a nurse, or a teacher or even a lawyer. Although, only a few weeks earlier, I had met someone who was retiring after 30 years as a GP. And

he said he was pleased because now he would be able to engage in mission. And I could have wept. I could have wept that his church had not equipped him to see his life's work as an act of mission. And I could have wept that he had been enslaved by this tyranny of being religious.

I suppose it's easy to see where God is in what you're doing if it's obviously creative, if you're an artist or a craftsperson. If you're a Christian bricky or plasterer, then every wall you build, every surface you plaster is an act of worship. But I guess we have to recognise that it's more challenging if you earn your living in a call centre, cold-calling people about changing their energy supply. But that challenge is for us to rise to.

I suppose there is also a danger of prioritising activity and the world of work. To safeguard against this we need to draw a clear distinction between productivity and creativity. We need to develop a theology of retirement as well as a theology of work to grasp what

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

the Monday to Saturday ministry into which we're dismissed is all about. It's not necessarily about being productive. If you've spent decades with the drudgery of having to go out and earn a living and now do little more than potter around the garden, that may seem like indulgence if you're under the spell of the protestant work ethic. But if you understand every fuchsia that blossoms and every tomato that ripens to be for the glory of God, you're developing a theology of creativity.

And if we can do that, we're being equipped to be dismissed into the world and for our Monday to Saturday lives to be sanctified in truth. And that means that when we pray Thy Kingdom Come, it's more than religious rhetoric.

Amen.