

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY EASTER 7b: 12/5/2024:

GEOFF CHADWICK: JN 17.6-19: SOLILOQUY

Gospel

John 17.6-19

⁶ ‘I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³ ‘I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

No doubt you have heard of soliloquies. These are monologues spoken by a character in a play that others (other than the audience) do not hear. Only the audience hears them. The monologue usually reveals a secret aching of the character. Often it is spoken when the character is near death.

Shakespeare’s Macbeth comes to mind:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

(“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” Macbeth, Act V, Scene 5 - William Shakespeare (1564-1616))

Or from the futuristic film, *Blade Runner* where the humanoid Roy Batty begins to understand mortality:

“I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.”

<https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/blade-runner-ive-seen-things/>

Or one from a dying cancer patient I knew:

“I’ve done my best- I can go now.”

Soliloquies are not new. The last chapters of John’s Gospel are one continuous soliloquy. In his last hours, Jesus is praying to God, and , the audience get to listen in. We are eavesdropping. As we listen, we also discover more of Jesus’ character; or more importantly more of his relationships with the Father (God) and the Spirit.

His is a long version of *“I’ve done my best- I can go now.”*

So what does Jesus’ soliloquy tell us?

Firstly, Jesus is a person who prays!

[Jesus says] I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours (Jn 17.9 ff, NRSV).

I don’t know about you, but I find prayer difficult. And if I’m honest I get doubts about its effectiveness. In those moments I have to remind myself that prayer is not giving God a shopping list! Oh, how we like to tell God what to do, and how to improve our lives! I’m not saying this isn’t important, because pouring out our desires before God is a sign of a healthy relationship. After all what parent has never had a child who asks for things. How wise a parent it is when they don’t always give-in.

However, over the years I’ve come to realise that prayer is more like contemplation. It is a stilling of oneself to such an extent that the Spirit of God wells up from within. Introverts like me do this quite naturally, but it is a skill to be learnt. It’s amazing how stilling the soul

brings a divine presence that can't be explained. In the stillness, God finds us, not necessarily the other way around!

Secondly, Jesus has been on a mission which is nearly complete.

[Jesus continues] My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified (Jn 17.16-18, NRSV).

Sanctification means to be set apart for a Godly purpose. Jesus has been set apart and has fulfilled his Father's purposes. It is now time for the "chosen ones". They are to be set apart, in a sometimes hostile, world for the sake of God's purposes.

How's your setting apart going? How good are you at knowing you are a chosen one?

Humans love to conform! Just tell that to the lone Eagles supporter sitting in a sea of Dockers! We tend to follow the fashion and engage in "group think." Parish Councillors watch out!

But as Christians we are not called to conformity when it comes to injustice or untruth. Jesus' prayer is for courage. The world will not always be sympathetic to his message. [As he prays:]

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (Jn 17.15, NRSV).

(Oh dear! AFL football on Good Friday- it's just not right- and I will boycott the game even if the Dockers are playing!)

Take a moment to think about where your Christian identity is challenged.

At work, in the family, amongst friends...? Then remember Jesus' sanctifying prayer for you.

Maybe my football example is too trivial!.. but Jesus does set us apart for God's purposes!

Thirdly Jesus is "going away" to the Father but will send the "Advocate" (Spirit) to fill the gap.

[He prays] I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. (Jn 17.11, NRSV).

Sometimes we need absence in order to mature. Little birds get thrown out of the nest. The toddler learns to run. The adolescent loses and makes new friends. Young men and women leave home to begin new families. Departing is part of life!

Jesus had to leave for the sake of the maturation of his disciples. He knows it is time. Like my friend with cancer, he prays:

“I’ve done my best-I can go now.”

I have an interesting idea. I think Jesus’ farewell discourse in John’s Gospel is also John’s farewell. Whist not equating his life with that of Jesus, John, the writer, in his old age, is farewelling his disciples. I can see a parallel in his thinking: *“If it’s good enough for Jesus it’s good enough for me.”*

John says: *“I’ve done my best-I can go now.”*

And; Bye the way, I too, have not abandoned you. Here is my account of Jesus’ life.

I wonder if you’ve ever had to say: *“I’ve done my best-I can go now.”*

If you have, the chances are these were words of grief. Chances are, you’ve had to farewell something or someone you have cherished. On the other hand, there’s also the chance that these have been the words of “good riddance”; where departing was a self-saving exercise. Take hold of these memories of loss and be comforted in knowing that Jesus was well acquainted with loss and suffering himself. His final parting is marked by deep heartache. But even so there is still hope.

The Advocate (the Spirit) will come!

Fourthly, the Son the Father and the Spirit have a mutual belonging in each other.

[Jesus Prays to God] all I have is yours, and all you have is mine (Jn 17.10, NRSV).

We have an inkling of Trinitarian theology here. Although its final formulation was to take another 400 years, this understanding of the mutual indwelling of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit is of no small significance. That's because what we believe about God ultimately affects how we treat one another. Tyrants, believe in a tyrannical God, Humanists limit Jesus to his humanness. And Spiritualists are in danger of heading off into unbridled enthusiasm. The three are needed to bring oneness though diversity; and if we as creatures of God, are meant to live in God's image, we too must do the same. That is; bring oneness in diversity. So Jesus knew when it was time to go. But he did not leave us empty. He left us with the promise of the Advocate – but that's next week's surprise. He also left us with a hint of the Trinity- a belief that to model God well we must be persons indwelling one another with the goodness and love of God's Spirit. Better still – it is the Spirit that gives us the ability to do this. But that's the surprise after next week's surprise.

Meanwhile let's live in today's promise: that the Advocate is surly coming!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.
