

Easter 7A

June 5, 2011

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 1:6-14

Jesus ascends to the right hand of God. All devoted themselves to prayer.

Angels said, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" The call was not to wait for heaven to arrive, but to get ready to go to work to bring glory to God.

Psalms 68:1-10, 33-36

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he might exalt you in due time.

Jesus' High Priestly prayer; "I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me." "This is eternal life, that they may know you." "Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus is in prayer to the Father. Jesus says this prayer on the night before he dies; after the Last Supper, after the foot washing, after Judas is told to 'Do quickly what you are going to do'. One of the great gifts of scripture is that Jesus says this prayer aloud so it could be recorded for us to hear the words, and to learn from them, and to be empowered by them.

This prayer is called 'Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, because he was praying on behalf of his followers in the same way a Jewish temple priest would offer intercession for the people of Israel. In the piece of this prayer that we read today, Jesus prayed for two things;

First, Jesus prayed that he, God the Father, and all of us who believe in Jesus, would share in divine glory. He prayed for God to be glorified because He had sent Jesus to us; for Jesus to be glorified because he had finished the work God had sent him to do; and for us to be glorified because we received God's Word through Jesus, we accepted that Word, and we accepted Jesus as having been sent by God.

Secondly, Jesus prays for the unity that he and God share to be extended to include our relationship to Jesus and God, and to include our relationship to each other. This is NOT a relationship that Jesus is offering to everyone on earth. Those 'of the world' are excluded. But for those who believe that Jesus was sent by a loving God, Jesus asks for a divine connection to be formed. Listen to these words again, that describe the loving relationship that Jesus wants with himself, God, and us. This is John 17 in the NLT:

⁷ Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, ⁸ for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me. ⁹ My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. ¹⁰ All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. (We bring Jesus glory by believing in him!) ¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

Jesus prays for our unity, and not for our UNIFORMITY. God created and loves the individual mix each of us has of gifts, likes/dislikes, talents, personalities, and life experiences. Our uniqueness is God's gift to us. Even in the ways we are unique, Jesus calls us to 'be one'. We have used the phrase 'faith family' here to express that commitment that you and I are making to 'be one'; to live our lives according to the values and character that Jesus modeled for us. Our commitment is to focus our guidance systems in making personal decisions and family decisions

and decisions for St Stephen's based on Jesus' character and values, rather than on what the world promotes as 'important' or 'acceptable'. We are 'one' in that focus.

Being in unity with each other brings glory to God. It does not mean that we agree on everything. But it does mean that all of us set the example of Jesus before us as our guide. And it means that we honor each other when we disagree, because we know that even in disagreement, each of us is acting to bring glory to God.

1 Peter says that we should even rejoice when we experience hardships or persecution because of our faith in Jesus Christ; because there will come a day that we will be glad and even shout for joy learning that these hardships lead to revealing Christ's glory. You and I bring glory to Christ, we fulfill the purpose we were created for, by the way we choose to live our lives.

Does the way we treat our kids, or parents, or people at work, bring glory to Jesus? Does the way we handle our mistakes, the way we treat people we disagree with, the way we settle arguments, bring glory to Jesus? Does the way we handle our money, our talents, our spare time, bring glory to Jesus?

As Christians, you and I are being called to ask that question about the decisions we make and the actions we take: Will this bring glory to Jesus? Will this bring glory to God?

Today is called 'Expectation Sunday'; the Sunday between Ascension Day and Pentecost Day. Ascension Day, last Thursday, celebrates when Jesus returned to heaven, to sit in his position of authority at the right hand of God. At a banquet in a royal court, sitting at the right hand of the king was the honored position reserved for the person of special favor to the king. Jesus earned that place with God by completing everything that God had given him to do here on earth. The event of Jesus' ascension is important news because it demonstrates God glorifying Jesus, because he did exactly what God wanted him to do.

Next Sunday is Pentecost, when we celebrate the gift that God gives US, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the HS God shares His glory with you and me. And we are given that glory simply because we believe in Jesus Christ. Through our fellowship in this faith family, we encourage and strengthen each other in the unity that Jesus prayed for in his High Priestly prayer. Jesus' ultimate sign of glorifying God is in giving himself up to dying on the cross. God's ultimate sign of glorifying Jesus is seen in the Ascension. God's ultimate sign of glorifying us is in giving us the HS, who empowers our fellowship to be much more than 'friendship'. OUR FELLOWSHIP is the work of unity with God, Christ, and each other. This is a sacred trust.

May our Lord Jesus Christ be honored and praised and glorified for what he has accomplished for our sakes. May we be encouraged and empowered by the HS to bring God into all of our relationships, so that others can see God's glory through us. That is the task Jesus has left with us; that is the purpose of the bond of fellowship that we share: We are not charged with gazing into heaven, waiting for Jesus to return. We are charged to live our lives bringing glory to God. May every one of us in this faith family be effective in doing it well. Glory to God!! Amen.