



Church in a Bag

Sunday 16 May

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering

Mighty God, in whom we know the power of redemption
You stand among us in the shadows of our time.
As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life
Uphold us with knowledge of the final morning
When, in the glorious presence of your risen Son
We will share in his resurrection
Redeemed and restored to the fullness of life
And forever freed to be your people.
Amen



Preparation

Jesus' long, powerful prayer for his disciples in John 17 has been referred to as the "high priestly prayer". Jesus now turns his heart and words toward God in prayer. The theme of this prayer is the unity of God, Jesus and the disciples - those belonging to God but given to Jesus. The words Jesus speaks to his followers were God's, but were issued by Jesus. The obedience the disciples demonstrate by following Jesus' words is actually an obedience to God's word and design.

The world, it seems, is both the place where Jesus' disciples belong and a scary, threatening place. Like a worried parent, Jesus now asks for God's special protective arm to shelter these disciples from the world's attacks. Jesus knows the disciples' place still remains with this world. He does not ask God to whisk his followers out of it. Neither did He pretend that all would be smooth sailing. As Jesus prepares to depart from his disciples, he leaves them with two weapons against the world: a joyful heart and the protective power of God's name.

First Reading: 1 John 5:9–13

“Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart”

Can you remember that nearly reckless abandon we had as children to climb and jump from trees; to jump from walls; to make the leap between benches; to jump from the bed into the arms of our parents, again and again. Fearless in our confidence to land safely or to be caught assuredly by those adult arms? If we had listened to our intellect, we'd never have done any of that leaping in faith and possibly learned to fear falling in love, establishing a friendship, and taking on something new or challenging.

The reading from 1 John is urging us to jump out into our faith by the testimony of Jesus to God's gift of eternal life. Real pushing-the-envelope stuff, which enables us to experience the fullness of life God created for us, and to which we are called by Jesus. John is making it clear that it is a faith, centred in an understanding of God, which we have come to know through Jesus, that enables us to tackle the challenges of the world.



The testimony of God, says the writer of 1 John, is that we have been given eternal life, and if you want to know what that is, don't sit at home pondering. Go JUMPING with Jesus! Do what Jesus would do, who has experienced life eternal! JUMP into the missional opportunities both in and around your church! JUMP at a chance to serve food in a soup kitchen! JUMP in with young people and youth activities! JUMP in a car and visit the elderly! JUMP up your weekly offerings to the church finances to keep the doors open to the community! JUMP in when you see someone in need! JUMP at a chance to use new ways to love and forgive friends and family beyond what is expected! JUMP in your faith with Jesus and you will find eternal life! And even if you fall, God's Spirit and the body of Christ are there to catch you. GO JUMP!

Second Reading: John 17:6-19

"I pray for them"

The first commandment Jesus gave his disciples was "Follow me!". The greatest commandment Jesus gave us was to "Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour and love each other, too". The last commandment Jesus gave before he was taken from our sight was, "Be my witnesses".

Actions and words are both important, but sometimes actions do speak louder than words. Jesus is coming to the end of his ministry. He knows his time is short. He is aware that before much longer his days of teaching and preaching with his disciples will come to an end.

Jesus' own life is a kind of perpetual prayer. His life is a continual offering of self to God and to those followers God had provided for him. In today's gospel text, we hear his high priestly prayer, requesting that the work he has done; the efforts he has made; the word he has spoken; and the witness he has shown will not come to an end, but will be continued in those followers God had provided for him to serve. The prayer will be further confirmed as Jesus moves to his Passion: those last days where he will show his ultimate care and concern for all humanity, as he willingly takes the sins of the whole world upon himself.

As we read his prayer, we can be sure that it is offered for more than those disciples who were present during his lifetime on earth. As we open ourselves to our Lord and his prayer, we may discover that his prayer is for us, for you and for me, just as strongly as it was for James and John and Peter and all the disciples who knew him in the flesh. Perhaps today, more than any other time, the Christian church needs to experience the power of our Lord's prayer for his disciples.

Our Lord prays for more than for us to simply get by. Our Lord prays for us to be like him and to know, in his strength, the source of grace to be found in an intimate relationship with his Holy Father. Our Lord prays we will discover the power of the Holy Spirit through the mediation found in him. Our Lord prays for us to be in the world, as he was in the world. Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit? Can you receive God's living word today? If you answer yes, then you are invited to take these last few days of this Easter season, to wait for the Lord to guide you into action. Let us be, "into Christ and out to serve". Amen. (Adapted from John Smylie)

A song to sing or to read: Sent by the Lord am I

Sent by the Lord am I
my hands are ready now
to make the earth a place
in which the kingdom comes.

Sent by the Lord am I
my hands are ready now
to make the earth a place
in which the kingdom
comes.

The angels cannot change
a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love
of justice and of peace.

The task is mine to do
to set it really free.
O help me to obey
help me to do your will.



*Translated by Jorge Maldonado © 1991
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Closing Prayer

Ever present God, you continue to present yourself to us when we least expect you. It startles us at first, but then that quickly turns to joy and a raised spirit. We do not fear and jump away, but respond to your way by living a startling life daily, reflecting the Good News and the unconditional love that you have for us.

Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton for preparing today's reflection



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