



# Sunday Reflection

## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 24 May 2020

## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

while all Church worship in the buildings is suspended

Today as we hear Jesus' farewell to his disciples in John's Gospel, and read about his ascension to heaven in the book of Acts, let us commit to deepening our understanding of what it means to say goodbye, and learn how saying goodbye is part of God's plan for our lives.

### Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"The hour has come... I am coming to you."** John 17:1, 11

#### An Illustration to set the scene

Every life is full of goodbyes in varying degrees – from saying "goodbye" to someone who has served us in a shop, to the pain of losing someone or something that has given meaning and value to our life. It could be saying goodbye to a loved one, a pet or a precious object, to familiar surroundings, or to our youth as we grow older.

The musician and writer Nick Cave and his wife, Susie Bick, lost their fifteen-year-old son Arthur in a tragic accident in 2015. When, in 2019, someone asked him, "How do we say goodbye?", he responded by writing:

*"... to say goodbye is an act of appreciation for the past that we have moved beyond, and a prelude to the new you that will, in time, require*

*its own goodbye, and as you continue to grow, further goodbyes, each a rehearsal for the final, most precious goodbye of all."*

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In today's Gospel reading we find Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples. It is part of the Upper Room Discourse, which spans chapters thirteen to seventeen of John's Gospel. This is an intense and intimate time that Jesus spends with his disciples, teaching about service, love, heaven and prayer. He spells out his impending departure and prepares them for life without him. Within the *Upper Room Discourse*, today's passage forms part of what is known as the **High Priestly Prayer** – and indeed Jesus' tone is reminiscent of a priest interceding for a congregation in their presence.

There is no prayer in the garden of Gethsemane in John's account, so this is Jesus' final prayer before his crucifixion. Afterwards, they will go to Gethsemane where he will be arrested and the events of the passion will quickly unfold. So this passage marks the transition between the *Upper Room Discourse* and Jesus' passion.

It opens with a reference to "**these words**" which Jesus has just spoken. These are words addressed his disciples, ending with Jesus' astonishing assertion: **"Take courage; I have conquered the world!"** Now, in chapter seventeen, he addresses God directly as **"Father"**, and prays for himself, asking God to glorify him, and then prays for the disciples.

How different is the goodbye that we heard in today's reading from Acts. The resurrected Jesus' last words before he ascends to be with his Father are full of hope and the promise of the Holy Spirit: **"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come**

upon you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth”.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives**

As we are in isolation here in Scotland, what can we take from these readings today as we are living through this pandemic time when many of us have faced loss? Saying goodbye is often melancholy, and sometimes the pain of separation is beyond words. We may feel as though we have been ripped, both emotionally and physically, from that which we love. We may feel as though the life has been drained from us. Yet, for all the heartbreak, each goodbye contains within it a new relationship with God. Jesus’ closing words today are all about unity:

**“protect them... so that they may be one, as we are one”**. Similarly, Jesus’ ascension, although it is a separation, is a reunion with the Father.

In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel knew the pain of separation and loss. He was one of those living in exile after Nebuchadnezzar exiled three thousand Jews from Judah, holding them in captivity in Babylonia. For all the upheaval and turbulence he lived through, Ezekiel’s faith was strong enough for him to be able to write the inspiring words that we find in these verses which can also be used on this 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

### **Ezekiel 36.24-28**

<sup>24</sup>I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. <sup>28</sup>Then you shall

live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

This beautiful verses speaks of God's eternal, unfaltering promise of new life and resurrection: *"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh".*

On the last Sunday of Easter our focus remains on resurrection and new life. As we look forward to the arrival of the Holy Spirit, blazing with fiery vitality, next week at Pentecost, it is fitting to meditate on saying goodbye, drawing from our scripture readings a deep understanding of God's promise of life even in the midst of loss. Because, though goodbyes can be painful, we can rejoice that those we have loved and lost have been united with their heavenly Father, and joyfully anticipate our own reunion with God.

**"The hour has come... I am coming to you."** John 17:1, 11

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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