

Sermon 17 May 2015  
Psalm 1 John 17:6-19 'Flourish'

*Prayer: God of all wisdom, give us pictures of the life you want for us. May your ways be our ways as we sink our roots deep into your holy Word. Guide us in building a Spirit-led community that flourishes producing fruit which is pleasing to you, and good for our world. Amen.*

This week is the end of our church season of 'Easter' – last Wednesday was Ascension Day = 40 days after Jesus resurrection when he ascended to be with God, his Father. The last proper / official of the experiences of the risen Christ on earth, of course we know more happened and still happen but officially Ascension Day happens 40 days after Easter Sunday! Then 50 days later we celebrate Pentecost!

At Girls Brigade on Tuesday night, Julie led their devotions on this teaching – and I was able to remind them that the number of days is hidden in the name – Pente = 5 – 50 days after is Pentecost Sunday (next Sunday) which we call the birthday of **THE** Church. The day the Holy Spirit of God was poured out on the disciples in public, according to Luke in Acts c2. We'll have a shift in the scriptures offered to us following the formation of the early church through the long weeks of the Church season of Pentecost!

So today is the last of Jesus farewell to his disciples for a while. **About 20%** of John's gospel is Jesus last prayer or the High Priestly Prayer for his disciples. That's a lot of praying!!! And it is full of instructions and warnings **and** blessings and remember from last week, the promise of joy radiates from the centre of the teaching, this is **our gift** to have and to share from listening and living out Jesus teachings. cV

Have you ever taken the time to think about what you would do – if you were in Jesus place and knew what he knew about the next few days / week???? If you had the opportunity to talk to those closest to you *knowing* that you were about to die, **what would you say and do?** .... It's often said the one certainty we all have in this life is that we will die! Don't think this is for 'old' people to consider / think / act on because young people die as well and remember Jesus was only 33 years old.....

So, I have a few funeral plans lodged with me from people who have already begun to plan for their family and friends and make the trauma of death easier *because* some things that must happen have been organised. I know some have pre-paid their funeral. Please be careful who you engage with this – but we are blessed in our area with the quality of our Funeral Directors.

We write wills to help those who are left with our passing know what we want done with our resources. *I have* been putting on a table in the foyer these pamphlets – I got them from the Advanced Care Planning Organisation. They are challenging every one of us to talk to our loved ones, our friends and family about what kind of advanced care we want, so that if we become too sick to 'care' they know what we want. There are more pamphlets on the table- please help yourselves, I have them, because I think **it is Jesus** modelling for us to talk about what happens 'next' on earth – and in heaven! Cv

Jesus last dinner table conversation, his last great prayer according to John was all to advise / encourage his disciples on how to keep going after he died. And the much repeated idea is that we can **only keep going** if we stay with him. So we have the picture of the vine with us as branches, completely dependent on the vine for all our internal needs and the vinedresser for all our external needs. We have Jesus saying we have to **'abide' in him**, another word for a complete indwelling / completely drawing all living requirements from him.... And today an even more detailed prayer for the disciples – who are in the world for holiness and unity so that they stay connected in the relationship of God- Father, Son and Spirit.

Jesus must have been very clear that life – real life, only life worth having was being in a relationship with him, his father and the Spirit – **staying** connected however it might be said or pictured and this life was to be shared because it was good, and joyful and life giving..... So today we have been given Psalm 1 to reflect on – and it becomes easy for us to see why / where Jesus was so influenced.

\*1 Seasons MediaCom Background, \*2 H Wallace, \*3 W Loader, \*4 N. Graham Standish *Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance*, \*5 Rev'd Dr Douglas Galbraith,

The first psalm starts with 'blessed' or more correctly 'happy' with the root meaning to be straight / be level / be right = the kind of 'happy' and therefore blessed because of being in relationship with God. The book of psalms has <sup>\*1</sup> the **most extensive** talk about God of *any* book in the Bible and is **the book most** referred to in the Christian scriptures. And just as Jesus said the very centre of our life in him is joy – so the psalms start by saying – happy and blessed is the most important starting point to talk about our life in God. Where and why do we let Christianity have such a sad reputation for doom and gloom??? Cv

<sup>on</sup> The psalm uses the picture of a tree to describe how <sup>\*2</sup> to live the 'right' way and of course the happy, blessed person is the 'righteous / flourishing one' lives God's way. They are 'like a tree planted by streams of water'. *Like such a tree* the person prospers from being in a place that constantly nourishes them, ensuring growth and stability. And like the picture of the vine with the vine dressing God, so the one planted they are sustained and cared for by another – by YHWH-God who's *Torah*, whose laws, whose guidelines for living, is always in their mind. **So** the logic is that the source of the prosperity of this person is not found within themselves but elsewhere, in the streams that feed them, and in the hand that planted them. We flourish because of our supplier and keeper – God in Christ! cV

And just what is meant by 'blessings / happiness' is spelled out in the psalm. First (v. 1), we see what it is *not*. <sup>\*5</sup> The verbs of restless activity which characterise those who choose the way of self-indulgence (follow, take, join, mock) are **contrasted** with the receptive response of those who live in God's law's (delight, meditating, being transformed like a tree by the river from shoot to bud to leaf).

'happy' person does not follow (literally 'walk in') the advice of the wicked; take the path ('stand') with sinners, or join where mockers sit. <sup>\*2</sup> These expressions cover all possible forms of illicit endeavour, from the active to the intellectual. And the shift from restless self-indulgent activity implies a movement toward permanent residency or stability, **provided in the relationship** with God and so others.

The picture being crafted before us is that security, stability and so the ability to flourish, is for all those **in a** living relationship, growing in God, through Jesus. As <sup>\*4</sup> Christians, we have a "radically different... life of balance with Jesus as the balancing fulcrum" compared with "the Western kind of life that is rooted in stimulation and activity." **God, wants** a life for us that is "rooted in the values of God's world," not this one' but one where delight, meditating and transformation / growing have a significant role in our lives!

And because it's not simple, living this way, Jesus prays and is still praying for us! In this piece of his prayer there are <sup>\*3</sup> three major concerns for us. He prays because we are in the world – trying to be happy and live in our blessings but being surrounded by hostility – which killed him, allowing him to ascend to God – but leaving us behind – right in it!!! He is worried that we might give up because it is so hard and that we will not be able to keep to task and continue to offer the Word of his "living-love" for all people.

He prays for his second concern – that we might lose our holiness. <sup>\*3</sup> Being kept from the devil and being kept holy are two sides of the one coin. To lose holiness is to lose touch with Jesus, the Son and the Father. Losing holiness in this prayer is losing the relationship with God and Jesus and each other, which means death. Jesus didn't want that, so he was concerned and prays that we will remain holy – live right – be happy and blessed and keep focused on being productive, fruit bearing followers of his!

Jesus third concern in this prayer today is about unity. On one level his prayer was a failure: divisions exist. But it can be argued that John's Jesus never meant unity for the sake of unity! <sup>\*3</sup> Unity was not an ideal in itself, but always and only in the context of unity with Jesus, the Son and God the Father; a unity of relationship that **gives life** in abundance to all.

So in this prayer our unity is in God and what God in Jesus is doing – and he is praying that we will stay growing deep roots in his teachings and being nourished by his Word – so that our joy will radiate and others will join us – because in the terms of these texts – when we are joined in God's community we are productive and flourish. Amen.

<sup>\*1</sup> Seasons MediaCom Background, <sup>\*2</sup> H Wallace, <sup>\*3</sup> W Loader, <sup>\*4</sup> N. Graham Standish *Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance*, <sup>\*5</sup> Rev'd Dr Douglas Galbraith,