

Sunday 17th May 2026. Benefice Communion, Ampleforth.

“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

John 17 records what is often called the ‘High Priestly Prayer’, spoken by Jesus just before His arrest and crucifixion. In these verses, Jesus prays for Himself, His disciples, and ultimately for all believers, for you and I. He begins by acknowledging that His “hour” has come, the moment of glorification through the cross, resurrection, and ascension, and He prays that God’s glory may be revealed through His completed work.

Jesus goes on to pray, *“this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God.”* This prayer frames eternal life not merely as salvation from sin, but as knowing the Father in a deep relational way - Eternal Life as Relationship. Jesus does not describe this “eternal life” in terms of *time*, but in terms of *relationship*. Eternal life is to know God, and to know Christ, and in knowing Christ, we experience His glory; in knowing Christ, we belong to God. What Jesus was saying about himself, he was simultaneously saying about all of reality. He then goes on to affirm that all who believe in Him belong to God, and he asks for God’s glory to shine through his followers.

John’s writings are all about our relationship with God and God’s relationship with all of humanity, with all of creation, with the whole cosmos and every atom. The gospel and letters of John are all about God revealing His glory, the nature of His very self, and God’s love for the cosmos as seen through the relationship of love shown to

us in the person of Jesus, who is the Cosmic Christ. We if we are His followers must do the same. If we do we are filled with God's Joy; we are meant to be full of joy because our joy in God reflects the joy of the Trinity. Creation is an act of God's joy. The more faithfully and hopefully we respond to God's love in our life, and experience His love in our world, the greater will be the fullness of our joy.

In addition, John illustrates that Jesus is concerned about disunity and division because disunity and division destroy relationship. So, Jesus prays that the disciples will be one. He desires unity for his followers. This unity is not an ambiguous declaration which papers over differences among people. It is rather an extension of John's understanding of what eternal life or salvation mean. In John's gospel, eternal life is not about a place or a gift or a certificate of acquittal for life after death so much as it is about a relationship. That relationship is one of love and oneness, just like the relationship which exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, it must also include such a relationship of love among disciples; otherwise, something is simply not being properly understood.

Jesus prays for the unity of His disciples, "to be one" asking that they may be one as He is one with the Father. This unity is foundational for the Church's witness and mission. It is a unity rooted in love, shared purpose, and connection to God. Within that oneness there will always be diversity, and that is divine. It is division that is diabolical. Unity exists all around us even at atomic level as quantum physics is revealing to us. This unity is held in

tension by diversity. Division is caused when we think if something is different to what we think, it is wrong. It is not wrong it is just different. Only God has the complete picture, and we can only find unity in Him through Jesus. In other words, if God is in you and you are in God, and God is in me and I am in God, we are united not in each other and therefore different but are united in God through Jesus with each other, and we are one in our diversity.

This unity is threatened when we don't allow our diversity it to be visible and we let division cause us to fail. This can be caused by religious dogma, doctrine, tradition, prejudice. If we allow any of these things to become more important than our diverse unity we fail the prayer Jesus said for us to be one so that God's glory be revealed.

John 17:1-11 invites believers to enter the heart this prayer of Jesus; to know God intimately, to live in unity with one another, and to participate in His mission with courage and faith. It reminds us that the Church's strength and growth are rooted not in numbers who turn up on a Sunday, in procedures or buildings, but in loving relationships and shared purpose found only in God. This passage challenges us to align our lives with Christ's prayer, seeking God's unity, in all things. Such unity needs divine diversity and incorporating the richness of that diversity among us. It is about living as one.

Thanks be to God. Amen.