

The Hour has Come - Joy, Truth, Unity

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of February 2005. The preacher is Rod McArdle.

His sermon is entitled, The Hour Has Come, Joy, Truth, Unity, and is based on John chapter 17, verses 1 to 26.

Well, friends, firstly let me express our thanks on behalf of Cheryl and the kids for just the extraordinary warm welcome that you've given us. You've made us feel just very quickly at home.

And, of course, a working bee really helps to feel part of a place, doesn't it? Joe and Tony were work friends. Joe wanted to know more about Christ and wanted to know what it meant to be a Christian.

So he asked Tony because he'd noticed that Tony's life had radically changed about five years earlier. Back then, Joe had asked Tony what was going on and Tony had said something along the lines of repenting of your sins and trusting in Jesus for your salvation.

[1 : 16] Well, Joe had mulled this over time and again as he observed Tony. Years passed, there was no doubt that Tony's life really had changed and Joe needed to understand better what was going on.

So Tony had been taking Joe through a series of basic studies on Christianity and it was towards the end of the fifth session and after Tony had been explaining to Joe about how fantastic it will be when he will be physically present before the Lord in heaven Joe stopped him, turned to him and asked Tony, listen, if the future's going to be so stunning then what are we doing here?

I mean, why hasn't this Jesus, the one you say is God, the one who can do anything, well, why hasn't this Jesus, why didn't he just take you straight to heaven when you trusted in him?

If you were Tony, how would you have answered Joe's question? Let me pray for us. Lord, as we open your word this morning there's just a tremendous chapter 17 in John's Gospel.

We thank you that you're revealing God, we thank you that you've revealed yourself supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. We thank you for your revelation and your word. Lord, I pray now that each of our hearts would be open to the encouragement, to the challenge, to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 48] We ask this for Christ's sake. Amen. This prayer in John 17 is the longest prayer which is recorded in any of the Gospels. I want to suggest it ought to grab our attention for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it gives us a tremendous glimpse of a conversation within the Godhead. In fact, it's the most extensive example of communication between two members of the Godhead, between the Father and the Son.

And it comes at a very strategic time. It's between Jesus' final instructions to his disciples in chapters 14 to 16 and then his passion where he lays down his life as a ransom for sinners.

And also in chapter 17, it's as if Jesus pauses. He stops and reflects on his earthly ministry. The great Scottish reformer, John Knox, had this prayer, John 17, read to him every day during his final sickness.

And in the closing moments of his life, he testified that these verses continued to be a great comfort and a source of strength for his conflict. This very act of Jesus praying expresses his total dependence on the Father.

[4 : 08] And if you turn to that passage, page 879, I encourage you to grab a few Bible as we go through this. As we look at that passage, you'll see that first of all, Jesus prays for himself in the first five verses.

And then he prays for his current disciples, verses 6 to 19. And then he prays for his future followers in the remainder of the chapter. And that includes all of us, if we have indeed trusted in Christ as our Saviour and Lord.

We've heard the chapter read and as you listen to it, I'm sure you'll agree with me that there's just no hint, there's no suggestion of any despondency by the Lord himself.

Have a look at the immediate context. Back in chapter 16, verse 33, Jesus says to the disciples, I've said this to you so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you face persecution, but take courage, I have conquered the world. And that little word, world, occurs many, many times through chapter 17.

[5 : 13] Primarily, not in every case, but primarily it refers to the realm of mankind, to the framework of human society that is hostile to God, hostile to his Christ, and hostile to Christ's people.

So Jesus begins his prayer, Father, the hour has come. And that expression, either the hour is coming or the hour has come, has been used by the Gospel writer throughout the Gospel, beginning back in chapter 2, verse 4.

The hour has come. The whole of Jesus' life and ministry has pointed towards this time, to the time of his glorification. And John speaks of Jesus' glorification, if you like, as a summary for all of the events that comprise his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension, and his exaltation to the right hand of God the Father.

And notice in verse 2 that the Father has given the Son authority over all people. And the result of this authority is that Jesus can give eternal life to all the ones that the Father has given him.

Throughout the prayer, you may have noticed this through the reading, verse 6, 9, 11, 12, 24, we see that believers are the Father's gift to the Son.

[6 : 38] I want to suggest to you this morning that that's a fact that is really worth contemplating. If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are the Father's love gift to his beloved Son.

The reality is that we can become very weighed down by simply seeking to exist in a very fallen world with all of its cares and troubles.

But we can take great comfort. In fact, we can have lasting joy by the fact that we have been given by the Father to the Son.

And Jesus gives eternal life to all the ones that the Father has given him. And we have to hold that teaching with Jesus' teaching so clearly throughout Scripture that people's response of belief or unbelief determines whether or not they receive eternal life.

And John the Gospel writer repeatedly brings this topic of eternal life up throughout his Gospel. And so in verse 3 we see that Jesus defines it. But they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[7 : 49] Now this is not knowing just in the sense of knowledge. It's knowing in the sense of relationship. Experiencing eternal life is absolutely inseparable from a relationship with Jesus Christ, the one whom the Father sent.

It is impossible to know the Father apart from the Son. And on such a critical point Scripture is so unambiguously clear.

Because again in this Gospel in chapter 14 Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And this isn't just a question if you like, of believing that God exists. Because in James 2 we read that even the demons believe and they shudder. Eternal life isn't something that we earn.

It's not something that we earn by our character or by our conduct. It's a gift. It's a gift that we receive by admitting that we're sinners, by repenting of our sins and trusting in Christ and Christ alone.

[8 : 59] So Jesus prays, this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent. that's a unique statement.

It's an exclusive statement. It's an absolutely true statement. And I appreciate in saying that, that that is a message that an increasingly relativistic, pluralistic Australian society doesn't want to hear.

the tragedy is that even within the so-called visible church, there's an increasing hostile and vocal opposition to the centrality and the uniqueness of Christ as the only means of salvation.

If you've been reading TMA, the Melbourne Anglican, in recent months, I'm sure you will have noticed a series of articles, a series of articles by Peter Adam from Ridley College and also by a lecturer from Trinity College on this very subject.

These articles, not surprisingly, have provoked numerous letters to the editor of the paper and in the February issue there was one letter in particular that grabbed my attention. The letter writer states, It seems to me that the exclusivity claim of Christianity is one of the greatest arguments in favour of atheism.

[10 : 26] It's an amazing statement, isn't it? It's a stunning statement. Friends, this is not just a dry academic debate. The issue goes to the absolute heart of who Jesus is because he isn't just one among many spiritual gurus.

He is very God and he is very man. He's the only one who could make perfect sacrifice for our sins. And as I read through that February issue, I have to say that in my heart I praise God that our Archbishop writes so very clearly on this very point.

He writes in his column, Knowledge of the one true God is discovered in and through Jesus Christ and in no one else and nowhere else.

Well in verses 4 and 5 if you look at those Jesus states that he's glorified the Father by completing his mission. What was this mission of Jesus? To reveal the Father through his life and his ministry and then culminating in giving himself on the cross.

Where he indeed cried out, it is finished. Jesus' death, his resurrection and then his exaltation would be the means of his return to the Father and to the glory that he had previously shared with the Father.

[11 : 52] So that's the first five verses as Jesus prays for himself and then in verses 6 and following Jesus prays for his current disciples 6 to 19 and then his future disciples.

But just kind of dry down to verse 20 because you'll notice from verse 20 that we in fact are caught up in this prayer from verse 6 on if we are followers of Jesus Christ.

And so as we go through these verses let me encourage you to think very clearly about the application in your life as Jesus, if you like, is praying for you.

In verses 6 to 10 Jesus gives a brief review of who the followers are. Let me just read verses 6 to 8. I've made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.

They were yours and you gave them to me and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you've given me is from you. For the words that you gave to me I've given to them and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me.

[13 : 01] Look at verse 6. The Father has given the disciples to Jesus. That's the language of election. The Gospel writer John shows no uncomfortableness throughout his whole Gospel in writing about the predestination of individuals.

But notice that the disciples are not treated as robots, are they? Because the disciples are the ones who have believed and the ones who have obeyed. And again and again throughout Scripture we get this affirmation of God's unconditional sovereignty and man's free agency.

In verse 11 Jesus addresses the Father as Holy Father and that's a unique designation in the New Testament. And in the context it just resonates with meaning because holy primarily has the idea of being set apart.

God is the measure of holiness and so whatever is holy is separated unto Him. In verse 12 we see that Jesus has been keeping the disciples separate from the world and now the Father will continue to keep them set apart in verse 11.

Jesus is soon to actually physically be leaving and His disciples are going to remain in the world. Friends, I want to suggest that the great challenge is to be in the world but not to be of the world.

[14 : 30] That is, don't adopt its values and its inherent antagonism towards Christ. The Old Testament again and again testifies of the difficulty that Israel had when it was surrounded by pagan practices.

And I want you to note carefully just the importance of what might seem at first glance just some little words in this prayer. And for those who love their English these are little words that might even be called prepositions.

Let me just highlight just a couple of these and then reflect on how important they are. the beginning of verse 6. I've made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.

The end of verse 6. They were yours and you gave them to me. Verse 11. They are in the world. Verse 14. The world has hated them because they do not belong to the world.

Verse 15. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world. Those little words in my own life have had a profound effect on me. I guess it was somewhere around about not on any particular day but somewhere around about 16 years ago when I was saved.

[15 : 43] And some years after that as I studied the chapter those little words those little prepositions had a massive impact on how I saw my daily life as I sought to live for Christ.

Because as followers of Jesus Christ we're not to withdraw and simply get into a holy huddle. We're not to cut ourselves off from living and playing sport and working and going on holidays with our non-Christian friends and associates.

We are to be in fact in the world. That's our mission field. That's where we witness for Christ by both our lives and also by our words. But we're not to be of the world.

We're not to be consumed by its value. If you like drinking in all of its immorality, its double dealing, its deceit, its one-upsmanship, its style of leadership which is just so totally contrary to the servant leadership of Jesus Christ.

And we could go on with so many different examples of what it means to be of the world. We as followers of Christ are to be in the world. And Jesus prays in verse 15 that the Father would not take the disciples out of the world.

[17 : 02] Think then again about Joe's question to Tony. We're not raptured to heaven when we accept Christ as our Saviour and Lord because the Lord actually has work for us to do.

He sends us out. Jesus sent his disciples into the world. that's explicit in verse 18. And that's our calling as well because verse 20 brings us into that very picture and again that's a firm time and again throughout the New Testament.

We're the sent ones. We are Christ's ambassadors. And this parish of course has a tremendous history over a long time of sending missionaries to foreign lands and we ought to praise God for that.

It's a tremendous demonstration of love for those in foreign lands who haven't heard of the good news of the Gospel. And I want to encourage you to keep very high on your agendas that work in foreign countries.

And I really also want to encourage you with your vision for the local mission field. And maybe one way of doing that even this morning is for each of us just as we sit here and listen to God's Word to think about maybe, doesn't matter how many, six, ten people that we have lots of contact with.

[18 : 21] They might be people that we work with, they might be our neighbours, people that we're in clubs with. And we need to have a mindset, I want to suggest, that we have been sent into their world.

And I'm not talking about going to them and beating them over the head with your Bible. I'm talking about living authentic Christian lives before them, of sharing their joys and their sorrows in life, of being prepared to share the great news of Christ's gospel as we prayerfully seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as we share our lives with our friends, neighbours and work colleagues.

We're all actually called to this ministry because nowhere in scripture can you find that the Lord says well you don't actually start on this until you get to this age and by the way when you get to this age you can actually stop.

And nowhere in scripture does it say that only a particular personality type is called to this ministry. And you certainly don't have to be an evangelist and most certainly you don't have to have a theological degree.

But you do need to respond in loving obedience to the love that Christ has poured into your life. The Lord has died for you, he's died for me and we go into the world continuing his ministry with both the personal and the corporate indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 48] And that is I hope you agree just an absolutely fantastic privilege. But it brings with us an enormous responsibility to be sure that our lives don't shipwreck the words that we might proclaim.

You'll notice in the church news and on the back page details beginning tomorrow night of an evangelism training night. It's going to be held four nights throughout the year with a variety of speakers in short sessions just if you like on some most basic aspects some basic tips if you like on simple friendship evangelism.

Please don't think of evangelism as a program. Evangelism needs to be our very lifestyle. So in verse 11 Jesus prays Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one.

And the idea is one of a continual unity. Jesus requests the Father to protect his followers so that they may be unified. And that context of verse 11 of course is the disciples going into the world.

If you look down in your Bibles to verses 21 to 23 again Jesus prays for the unity of future believers. and again that's us and again the context is one of mission of being sent into the world.

[21 : 13] And this unity in mission is grounded in each follower's personal relationship with the Father and the Son and we know from the preceding chapters in John's Gospel personal relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Unity in mission is grounded in the follower's relationship with the Triune God. Well what are these followers of Jesus protected from?

Clearly the devil and his schemes seeking to break up this very unity and it's nothing less than the Father's name that is the revealed character of God that's adequate to give this protection and the unity in mission it's multifaceted it's both what Jesus followers are and what they do.

I'm sure you can then quickly see that dangers are going to arise in areas where we destroy unity in love where we destroy unity in purpose where we destroy unity in holiness where we destroy unity in truth and we get a better idea of what this protection entails that is being in the world but not of the world in verse 17 where Jesus simply prays these wonderful words sanctify them in the truth your word is truth and sanctify here has the primary sense of being set apart for God's use back in verse 14 the disciples were distinguished from the world by their acceptance of God's word friends the Bible is God's very revelation to us my question to everyone who's gathered here this morning is do you actually personally believe that that the

Bible is God's very revelation to us I guess as I and as a family we start here in this parish a parish with just a wonderful history of upholding the authority and inspiration of the Bible but don't take that lightly don't just say yeah well that's sort of been our tradition in the past it's absolutely vital it's vital if we're not going to slip into apostasy it's vital for us remaining in a living communion with the living God well we've looked at a couple of things in the chapter and this chapter is just absolutely jam-packed with treasures as I was looking at a commentary through the week by a famous expository preacher when he was going through John's gospel I think he did something like seven or eight sermons on this chapter but relax we're moving on next week but just maybe a couple of things as we close notice in verse 13 that Jesus prays that his joy that is the joy of doing his father's will would be complete in his followers joy absolutely irrespective of circumstance here's Jesus on the way to the cross and then look down at the end of the prayer in verse 26 with me because we've got this astounding statement of love as followers of

[24 : 34] Jesus Christ we're swept up into the richness of the love that exists between the persons of the triune God that is worth meditating on and it's certainly worth praising the Lord for or what's Christ's ultimate desire then for his followers verse 24 father I desire that those also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory which you've given me because you love me before the foundation of the world the verse reminds us that our time here is only transitory this is not the end while we're here of course we are to glorify the Lord by responding to his call to be heralds of the good news of the gospel but that's not the ultimate goal one writer has rightly summed up our ultimate goal is to see the glory of our exalted redeemer in the presence of the father friends may we be faithful witnesses to the crucified risen and exalted

Lord Jesus Christ we're to be in the world but not of the world we're protected from the evil one as we hold to God's very word of truth his holy scriptures amen you