

Sunday 1 June 2025
The Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sunday after Ascension

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: Acts 16: 16-34

NT: Rev 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20 end

Gp: John 17: 20- end

Today is the Sunday after Ascension Day. The Sunday before Pentecost. Behind us is the life of Jesus, his death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension. In front of us is the unknown, the very new thing that God will do among his people. How do the disciples feel in this sort of no-man's land in time?

They don't know how long they're going to be there. All they know is that in his physical form Jesus seems to have finally left them – taken up in the brilliance of the light of heaven – and that he has told them to wait in Jerusalem where God will come to them in a new way. I wonder how they're feeling?

Just think: three or four years ago they were living perfectly ordinary lives, like we do, with families, friends, in communities and day to day routines that they followed almost without thinking just as we do. Then this man, Jesus, told them to follow him and they did – they just did. They followed and saw and heard and experienced things they sometimes can still hardly believe. And they loved him, they still do. All of them at some point or another all said they'd be willing to die for him yet all of them failed him, some more spectacularly than others.

They lived through the tension, the mounting danger and the terrible execution that ended the life of their Lord in Jerusalem. They've lived with that terrible sense of loss and grief when life had no meaning or purpose, and their hearts were heavy, dreading the bleak future ahead of them.

Then the light of resurrection exploded around them. Jesus was alive again, talking with them, eating with them, teaching them. His appearances were unpredictable and sometimes very brief but after the initial shock none of them doubted the reality of his resurrection.

Now he's left them again and they're living with a renewed sense of loss. Not as sharp and bitter as the first but hard to bear all the same. They don't know what's about to happen. They don't know about the great woosh of a mighty wind which will knock them off their feet. They don't know about the orange and red crackling flames of fire that will fill them with courage and conviction.

They don't know about the Holy Spirit who is going to breathe new life into them, transforming them into the fullest being of themselves, alive with God's life and filled with his awesome, mighty Spirit. For now, they are in a "no-man's land" of time.

We've probably all experienced similar times – times that can be filled with uncertainty and anxiety. Times when we've lost someone or left something behind but aren't yet ready or able to move on into the unknown. Times between school or college and the world of work and careers. Times of waiting ... for a birth, or a death or a medical diagnosis; life-changing times and unplanned breaks in our way of life.

I was in one of those uncertain times once, I handed in my notice to a toxic employer with no firm plan of what would come next. By the grace of God and the fact that there is always a shortage of social workers, I was able to finish the toxic employment on the Friday and start the next job on the Monday. Phew!

Perhaps we're in one of those uncertain times now and don't know where God is going to lead us next. We have been in an interregnum now here at Our Lady and St Nicholas since last year. We are between incumbents, but we have a date when Fr Philip will be installed and then the wait will be over. Fr Philip joins us at a very poignant time for the city.

Liverpool have just brought the cup home and unfortunately on the same day, there was a dreadful tragedy, and many people were injured here on our doorstep. We need to keep the injured and their families in our prayers and trust that the criminal justice system will achieve the right outcome. Fr Philip, the clergy and lay team here will be led by the Holy Spirit to what lies ahead for us here in our church, our community and the wider area.

If we have any sense of being in one of those in-between places today perhaps, we could spend this week reflecting on that, thinking about what is "now" and "here" for us; considering what we might be needing to put to rest, what thoughts and attitudes we might be needing to give up within ourselves. We might be carrying unnecessary baggage that is holding us back in our walk with God.

Experience tells me that very often, we cannot move forward until we have put down the past or made a decision that we want or need to move on. Just as the wind and fire of Pentecost descended only when the disciples knew that Jesus' time on earth really was over, so God can only lead us forward when we've stopped trying to hang on in an unhealthy way of the past.

I believe that if we give ourselves fully to "now" and "here", whatever that means for us, on the day of Pentecost, whenever that day is for us, we'll be ready to go forward again, ready

to say yes to God's plan for us. We don't need to be afraid of saying yes to God. God cares for us and protects us. God knows about our need for time: time to grieve; time to summon up courage; time to make big decisions. God will allow us that time.

However, sometimes God knows we need a bit of a push or a bit of a wakeup call to nudge us into action and he'll do that for us in ways we might least expect! He may speak in the whoosh of a mighty wind, in the roar of tongues of flame or in the still small voice in the depths of our being. But he will speak, of that I have become certain.

In our Gospel today, in John 17, notice Jesus praying: not for himself, and not just for the disciples who are with him, but for all of us: "for those who will believe in me through their word." In this tender, intimate moment which has so much to teach us about prayer and about the nature of the Christ, Jesus is not performing a miracle or delivering a parable. He is interceding, longing, hoping. And what does he pray for? Unity. Oneness. That we may all be one. It's a powerful and deeply grace-filled moment. Jesus doesn't pray for uniformity. He doesn't ask that we all agree on everything, or become indistinguishable from one another. Instead, he prays that we may be united as he is one with God the Creator – connected through love, through relationship, through shared purpose.

This is not unity by force or conformity. It is unity rooted in grace. Grace says: 'You belong.' Grace says: 'You are included, not because of what you've done or what you believe perfectly, but because you are loved.' Grace is the divine thread that binds us to God and to one another, even when we struggle to find common ground. For those of us walking a path of open-hearted, inclusive discipleship, this passage is both a comfort and a challenge. It reminds us that Jesus' vision was always broader than any one group or tradition. His prayer reaches across generations, denominations, and ideologies. And it calls us into something deeper than agreement: it calls us into a relationship. But this unity isn't abstract. It shows up in how we live. Jesus says that the world will know who we are – will know that he was sent by God – by the love and unity we share. In a world often torn by division, suspicion, and fear, our calling is to be signs of something different: a community grounded in grace and held together by love.

So today, ask yourself: Where am I being invited into deeper unity with others: not through agreement, but through grace? How can I show the world what love looks like, in my words, my choices, my relationships? Where might I need to let go of pride or fear in order to embrace someone more fully? Jesus' prayer is still echoing through time. And we are part of the answer; not by being perfect, but by being people of grace. "That they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Let that love be our foundation. Let that grace be our guide.

Mthr Jenny Brady