‘JESUS’ PRAYER FOR HIMSELF’ (John 17, 1-5) 3 July 2022

This morning is the first of 3 Sundays when we delve into Jesus’ famous Prayer in John 17, the so-called ‘Farewell Prayer’, one of the most intimate and important passages in the whole Bible.

 We’re just doing the first five verses today, the ones we heard in the reading, where Jesus is praying for himself and his current situation. Judas has just been sent out of the Upper Room.

The events leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection have accordingly been set in motion.

 It strikes me that there’s a really huge amount to say about these five verses, but, to avoid our still being here when the roads around are totally gridlocked by the Grand Prix traffic, I’ll limit myself to just four reflections.

**Reflection 1**

The more one reads the little prayer, the more it seems to be a very condensed one. There’s surely a lot of background to it, not least what Jesus has been saying to the disciples in John 14-16, the so-called ‘Farewell discourse’: certain things that are totally understood and therefore unstated. So, in case it’s helpful, let’s start with a slightly longer version, with the things that seem in the background, things clearly understood between Father and Son, included:

Father, the hour for my crucifixion and death has come.

I have brought you glory by finishing the work you gave me.

I have finished my years of ministry on earth, and I have finished, just now, the setting in motion of my death and resurrection -

the starting-point and validation of salvation for mankind.

 So now, Father, Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you,

by bringing Your Son through death,

so He may, ever after, grant eternal life to those followers who know You, as the only true God, and Him, as Jesus Christ, sent down to the earth by You.

 Jesus, then, is not only praying for himself’ but also has the salvation of mankind very much in mind. Indeed, it seems the central thing in his thoughts.

**Reflection 2**

Maybe Jesus had a two-fold purpose for this particular prayer?

The reference to Eternal life in Verse 2 and its definition in Verse 3 seem things that Jesus didn’t *need* to tell his Father, but were absolutely crucial for his followers to get 100% right.

 So maybe Jesus here is both praying for strength for himself for what’s ahead and also, at the same time, wanting his disciples to hear this confirmation of everything he’s been saying to them in the Farewell Discourse, John chapters 14-16.

Like the whole Farewell Discourse, the prayer would be something for them (on the verge of having to cope by themselves) to hold on to, throughout all the dark days that would face them.

We can imagine the absolute AWE on the Disciples’ faces as they

heard this prayer.

**Reflection 3**

Interestingly, the theme of Glorification is one that seems to be running through much of the whole Farewell Discourse.

 In Chapter 12 Jesus says: The hour has come for the Son of Man **to** *be glorified*. And, a little later,

‘Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say?

“Father, save me from this hour?”

No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.’

And Jesus calls out ‘Father, *glorify your name*!’

And what happened?

There’s voice from heaven (which, we’re told, was specially for the disciples’ benefit): ‘*I have glorified it and I will glorify it again*!’

 Then in Chapter 13, just after Judas has gone out, Jesus says:

Now *the son of man is glorified* and *God is glorified in Him*.

*If God is glorified in Him*, *God will glorify the Son in Himself and will glorify Him at once.*

**Reflection 4**

is a particularly personal one, trying to relate what our readings may be saying to us this morning about the challenging rows of empty pews in so many of today’s embattled churches, including our own.

 Perhaps the whole idea of ‘glorification’ sits a little uncomfortably at a time when the Church of England, under massive pressure from current cultural and social orthodoxies, seems often very defensive and low-key in its public pronouncements, almost as if it’s beginning to lose confidence in all the good things it has done in the past and all the good things it is still doing today.

This is consonant with a deeply gloomy statistic, featured recently in a best-selling and seemingly reliable book, that in the past 40 years, i.e. since the early 1980s, church attendances have more than *halved*, not only in the UK but generally across the Western World.

 This being the case, perhaps we could benefit from comparisons between now and the days of the early church, the time of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whose opening words we heard this morning?

This reading showed us how the fruition of what-Jesus-had-prayed-to-His-Father-about-in-the-Upper-Room had given the early church joyful, glorious confidence, a confidence that would help it to overcome the huge odds stacked against it.

 The Epistle to the Hebrews opens, like Beethoven’s 5th Symphony, with all guns blazing:

In the past… God spoke to the prophets.

In these last days….. **God has spoken to us by his Son**

And **the Son is the radiance of God’s glory**

**The exact representation of his being**….

What an uninhibited glorification of Father and Son!

What a joyfully snappy exposition of the core of the Christian faith!

 Now more than ever, maybe, the beleaguered Church of England could take heart and inspiration from this in its missionary outreach,

clinging on to, and expressing whenever it can, that ‘**radiance of God’s Glory’**, with a renewal of wonderment and joy that God has spoken to us through Jesus, **‘the exact representation of God’s being’**….?

 The Bible is full of Beethoven’s 5th symphony moments, bite-size chunks, easily digestible even in a western world with severely diminishing background Biblical knowledge.

 Jesus’ prayer in John 17, meanwhile, reminds us, too, that the whole ‘Farewell Discourse’ in John 14-16 (just for starters) would be rich in such inspiring chunks, crying out for use (in a truly accessible form) in countering modern ignorance and cynicism:

with illustrations of the JOY and GLORY radiating from Father and Son, so central to our faith.

 ‘Father, *glorify your name*!’ cried Jesus.

 ‘*I have glorified it*, cried God’s voice, ‘*and I will glorify it again’*.

 (Concluding prayer)