



7th Sunday of Easter

17th May 2026



*A Sunday to heed Christ's call
for Christian unity.*

Stick Together and Don't Forget to Keep Praying

Greetings! It's great to be here as part of our church family, as we enter into the 7th week of Easter, having just celebrated on Thursday the Ascension!
May I welcome all who are watching via 'Live screen'.

Today's readings, reinforce to me, how prayer and Christian unity is so important, not only to us "followers of the way" but also as a wonderful witness of the truth and beauty of Christianity, to those people we meet in life.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Not taking away, by any means, from the events leading up to our Lords '**kangaroo court**' trial and crucifixion, and then his resurrection and then ascension into heaven, but, have we ever stopped and thought about the Apostles and disciples of Jesus and their emotional state after what they have been through over the last few weeks, in our Gospel readings, leading up to Christ's Crucifixion, the Resurrection and finally the Ascension?

Can we imagine what wild swings of emotion they have had to deal with?

- Firstly, experiencing the horrors of Good Friday,
 - with the anguish they felt for Jesus,
 - and the fear for themselves,
 - then the guilt over what they had done in deserting Jesus,
 - and then the confusion about their future, now that Jesus' mission had apparently failed.
- Then we have the beginnings of the rumours that Jesus was alive, with all the hope and terror and sheer bewilderment of that.
- And then, at last, normality again, with Jesus back amongst them, talking, teaching, making them feel at the centre of God's world, as he always did.
- And then lastly, Jesus' Ascension into Heaven.

It is unclear from the 4 Gospels and from Paul's writings, how long this period between the Resurrection and the Ascension was. The church's liturgical year suggest just a few weeks.

In Matthew's Gospel, it looks very short, while Paul seems to extend it to include the appearance to him on the road to Damascus.

John's account is the most vivid, with the details of significant meetings and memorable meals.

Whilst the book of Acts says in 1.3: ***After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.***

But for sheer poignancy, the first few verses of Acts are hard to beat. In verse 6, you can sense the disciples are clearly imagining that life will now go on like it was in the old days, only better. Jesus seems willing to concentrate only on them, with no preaching, teaching or healing outsiders, and he listens to them and answers their questions without the impatience or teasing that so often marked their relationship before. They have forgotten all their doubts about his mission, the terrible doubts that the crucifixion caused, and they are back to believing that Jesus is going to take over Israel, and that they will be part of the new ruling party!

And then suddenly they find that he is not going to stay, and that he expects them to carry on without him. You can just imagine, as they maybe trudge back to Jerusalem, back to the upper room again; the flatness of the description in Acts is striking!

We read nothing of their emotions – no fear, no despair, no joy. It seems that they are all out of feelings. We could imagine them, together, tiredly they get on with things, waiting for whatever it was that Jesus said he would send to help them, though they are not sure that they will know it when it arrives.

So, one minute they are the inner circle, waiting to hear about the plans for the kingdom of Israel and their vital part in the matter, and the next minute, they seem to be a leaderless, purposeless group of people. (Acts vs7), tells us that Jesus has refused, categorically, to tell them what's going on, but instead has left them a job to do, and a very daunting one at that. They have to be witnesses, all over the world!

Can we in our worldly understanding, looking from the outside and not knowing the story say, 'this Holy Spirit had better be good, whatever it is', if it is going to get this emotionally drained bunch of 'waifs and strays' going again?"

But, and here is the central message, over all the three years they were with Jesus, they have at least learned two things through what they have been through.

They have learned to stick together!

1. Whatever happens this time, they all want to witness it together, and
2. They have learned to keep praying.

What a message that is for all of us today!

If the crucifixion did not mean the end of all they had understood about God, then God's purposes have to be deeper, wider and stranger than anything they could imagine, and their only chance of not getting it hopelessly wrong again is to keep praying. Perhaps they themselves hardly realize the significance of those two lessons learned, but sticking together and praying are to become two of the defining characteristics of the new Christian community that Acts is going to tell us about.

In our Gospel reading today, prayer and community are equally obvious. Jesus's prayer for the disciples is that they 'may be one, as we are one' (v11). Christian unity bears witness to our understanding of God's unifying, reconciling work in Christ, which is not just something he chooses to do, but which demonstrates his own nature.

And after such a statement, do you have to ask what Christian disunity bears witness to? Jesus's prayer for the disciples underpins what we have already seen in Acts. Jesus knows that the disciples may feel left behind, bereft, after the ascension.

"I am no longer in the world," he says, "but they are."

So Jesus asks for protection for them.

But not protection from fear, or persecution (as the reading from 1 Peter makes clear), or any of the things we feel we want to be protected from.

He asks for protection for his followers ***'so that they may be one'***, and in their unity, demonstrate the loving unity of God.

Next week Pentecost! ***Amen!***