

JOHN 17:1-11
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

In 2001, we identified five core tasks for the congregation. These came about as a result of my listening to you, to people saying, “this is what we do; this is what we want to do!” All I really did was to put these congregational comments into some kind of shape and we’ve been working with these five core tasks ever since. There is nothing surprising about them: they are worship, mission, service, prayer and nurture; or whatever order you like! Some of our teams reflect these core tasks and we revisit them from time to time in the preaching to remind ourselves what the core tasks of the church are; maybe we’ll do that again over the summer? You will have the chance later in the year to say what you think we should do in these core tasks to make the church more effective as we shape the future. We do other things too, but everything else shapes round these five core tasks of the church. If we do nothing else, we do these five things.

In our passage today, we find two of these core tasks. John 17 talks about both mission and prayer and how these two core tasks connect. Mission is something God does; God has been on a mission since the beginning of the Bible story, a mission to bless the world; Jesus has a key place in that mission and “*Father...*” (*John 17:1*) suggests that this has come to some kind of climax, a turning point! The mission of God goes on; there is unfinished business in the mission of God in the world and we are called to partner with God in that mission, making disciples, telling others, serving the people around us; we look again at what mission means for us in our community, what God is calling us to be and do in the mission of God for our place. God has a mission; Jesus has finished His; what do we do? There is unfinished business!

Jesus prays for us. John 17 is all a prayer by Jesus for Himself, for His disciples and for us, all who believe. He prays and the Father listens. At this crucial moment in His life, in the life of His disciples and in the life of the church, He prays! On the night before He died on the cross for the salvation of the world, Jesus prays. If nothing else, that shows us just how important prayer is, that Jesus takes time, on this most important evening of His life, to pray. Prayer is a key part of the life of the Church: at the General Assembly this week, the very first thing we did was to approve a call to prayer for the whole church in Scotland; when we look at a strategy for the future of the Church, the first thing we are being asked to do is “to pray that God will do a fresh work amongst us as God’s people”. When we think about shaping the future of our congregation, prayer is vital, and lies at the very foundation of what we are as Christians, as a congregation in Juniper Green, and as a church in Scotland. Will God do a fresh work? Prayer is easier than you think. Let’s look at these through the eyes of John 17.

“*Father, the...*” (*John 17:1*) Glory is a big word; it is all about light and splendour and fame and honour. At first sight, Jesus’ prayer may seem selfish, praying for His own glory, His own fame and honour, but really His sole desire is the glory, honour, and fame of His Father; the glory of the Father and the glory of the Son are tied together and can’t be separated. Jesus prays that the Father be glorified and He knows that the Father will be glorified by two things the Son does: “*He might...*” (*John 17:2*) Jesus has given life to people in a new way and that life is described for us: “*This is...*” (*John 17:3*) People know God through Jesus; Jesus has given life to the people He has met, to the people who have believed; the life of the age to come has broken into our world and we know God in a new way. Second, the Father is glorified because the Son has finished His work: “*I have...*” (*John 17:4*) Now is the time when Jesus has a sense that His work is done; He is coming to the climax of His ministry; He will die on the cross and be raised and by His death and resurrection, His part in the mission of God will be complete and the Father will be glorified by the Son’s obedience. Tomorrow it will not seem as if the Son is glorified; it will seem as if the Son is humiliated and shamed on the cross, but this is what He came to do; the Father will be honoured by the Son’s obedience.

“I will...” (John 17:11) “As you...” (John 17:18) There is unfinished business! The disciples, the church, are sent into the world to continue the mission of God. We are sent by Jesus in the same sense that He was sent by the Father. We have a different mission – Jesus’ mission was unique, our mission is different, but still we are sent by Jesus. When I was inducted as your minister there is a brilliant question I was asked: “Are not zeal for glory of God, love to Lord Jesus and a desire for the salvation of all people... your great motives and chief inducements to enter into this ministry?” Why do we do the mission of God? For our own sake? To be famous? To be well thought-of in the neighbourhood? To be a successful church? Our great aim in life and in mission is to glorify God, to bring honour and fame to the Father. How do we do that? We do that by telling people about Jesus, by showing people what Jesus is like, by helping people come to faith in Jesus. That is what our mission is; not that people think well of our church, or that we have a fantastic building (these things help!); our mission is to lead people to Jesus, to bring glory to God. Jesus has left the world; we are still in the world; He sends us. There is unfinished mission business!

Jesus prays for us. What are the two biggest challenges we face in life? One: Life is a struggle; Two: Loving other people. What are the biggest challenges we face in church life? One: There are hard things to face. Two: how to be one church when people are different from one another. Jesus prays for us, for His disciples, for the church; what two things does Jesus pray? *“Father protect...” (John 17:11)* In that one prayer, these two biggest challenges are met by the way that Jesus prays for us.

“Father, protect...” (John 17:11) Surely God hasn’t answered that prayer? God hasn’t protected us, otherwise we would not have faced all the hard things that life has thrown at us? Let me give you an example; look at Peter. He professed that he would go with Jesus everywhere, even to die with Him if that is what it took. Jesus said *“Simon, Simon...” (Luke 22:31f)* How does the Father protect Peter? Peter goes through hell when he is faced with the challenge “you were with Jesus!” What does he do? Does he own up and risk prison and death? No! He disowns Jesus, he denies knowing Him. Has God not protected him? He has gone through this dreadful experience; but his faith didn’t fail and he came through that experience with his faith intact, a stronger person and more able to be the leader of the people that Jesus called him to be. His letter reflects something of that experience, surely: Christians were persecuted for their faith; some were martyred for that faith, Stephen, later Peter, Paul. Today the church in Egypt faces challenges from people who would kill Christians – does the Father not protect His children? These people die for their faith, not giving up that faith and the gospel gives us hope that they will share the glory of God. Ultimately and gloriously, God’s people are not destroyed but glorified; the church is not destroyed but God protects His people in a sense that we sometimes struggle to see!

“that they...” (John 17:11) The unity of the Church: from the very beginning there have been challenges to that idea. Should Gentile Christians become Jews as well as Christians? There were two views! 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In the 1517 reformation: how are Christians saved, by putting money in a box or by the grace of God? That was the question Luther asked and he rocked the boat; do we follow the Protestant reformation or the Roman catholic Church? This week, what is your attitude to same-sex marriage? There are two views of that in the church; where is the unity of the church? Does the Father not answer Jesus’ prayer? Or do we make life so difficult that it is not possible for us to be one? There is unfinished business in learning what being one means and looks like; we still have so much to learn about loving one another and accepting one another. Jesus still prays for us to be one; we give honour and glory to God when we live together in peace and unity and we take away from God’s honour and glory when we fall out and break apart! There is unfinished business and Jesus prays for us.

“What is man’s chief end?” That is the first question in the catechism with which our Scottish fathers were brought up; “man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Enjoy God

– what a fantastic idea! That’s for another time. We are to glorify God? We give honour to God, and build God’s fame in the world. How do we do that? We do that when we worship Him and sing His praises; the words of our hymns help us to praise God for His excellent goodness. We glorify God when we pray: we declare our trust in Him when we ask Him to love us and provide for us. We glorify God when we tell others about Him and His fame grows when other people come to faith. We glorify God when we live our lives in the right way, when we try to be more and more like Jesus.

Jesus glorified God when He brought life to the hearts of the people He met; Jesus glorified God when He completed the work He came to do. For us, this is still unfinished business; God is still about His mission and we are called to join in; there are times when that is a hard struggle. We are still challenged to love and care for one another and be one together. Jesus still prays for us – His unfinished business with us. Consider the words of a little song we sometimes sing: “In my life, Lord, be glorified; in Your church, Lord, be glorified!” Can that be your prayer for your life? Can that be our prayer for our church?