

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalm 103 (102); 1 John 4:11-16; John 17:11-19

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world

John 17:9 [Jesus said:] I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The exquisite chapter 17 of John's Gospel is, surprisingly, not much read in the liturgy. On Sundays, it is read only on the 7th Sunday of Easter, each year, distributed as follows: year A: 17:1-11a; year B: 17:11b-19; year C: 17:20-26. In those places where the Ascension is celebrated on a Sunday, this chapter is never read on a Sunday. However, it is also read during the seventh week of Easter on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, using the same divisions. It forms the climax of the Farewell Discourse, deliberately placed here by the evangelist and of obvious significance to him.

KIND OF WRITING

The whole of John 13-17 belongs to the genre of Farewell Discourse. The final chapter takes the following steps:

- i) Jesus prays for his glorification and describes eternal life (1-5)
- ii) The beginning of eternal life in the disciples (6-8)
- iii) Jesus prays for his disciples (9-19)
- iv) Jesus prays for future believers (20-24)
- v) Jesus concludes his prayer (25-26)

The portion appointed for the today forms the substance of John 17:9-19, when Jesus prays for his disciples. for the sake of completeness, the first two verses will be added here.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me. (Psalm 41:9)

There were some who pleased God and were loved by him, and while living among sinners were taken up. (Wisdom 4:10)

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is the truth. (Psalm 119:142; cf. Psalm 119:160)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Below is a chart showing how the Lord's Prayer is hidden in John 17 and received across the Gospel. There are also echoes of many passages in the Fourth Gospel itself.

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' (John 13:18)

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)

Thought for the day

Even a short reflection reminds us that speaking about God is indispensable and pointless. Somehow we need to hold the experience which is beyond words in our words of clay. Such God-talk serves to keep us oriented towards the Mystery. At the same time, we know that we are using our limited everyday experience to speak of the Mystery as such, strictly unique — beyond our minds and even our hearts. This is obviously the case when we say God is our rock. It may *feel* less obviously the case when we use words such as father, mother or even love itself...but even so, our limited lens illuminates *and conceals*.

Prayer

God, always greater, your love for us comes from your inner being as love itself. It astonishes us that we are so loved and that you care about each one of us so intensely. Amen! Amen!

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. (John 3:31)

He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. (John 8:23)

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. (John 12:31)

ST PAUL

I thank my God every time I remember you. I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners in God's grace together with me. For God is my witness that I

long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3–11)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 9 The opening word in Greek is *egō*, indicated an emphatic beginning. The verse clarifies for whom Jesus is now praying. The “world” has two meanings in John: the creation (good) and the powers against Jesus (evil).

Verse 10 The gender shifts to the neuter, the “things” meaning here God’s whole project in Jesus. In all those things, Jesus has been glorified, that is, his inner self has been disclosed.

Verse 11a The opening phrase gives us the perspective of this discourse: the post-Resurrection Jesus is speaking. Here “world” points to creation or earthly existence, in a positive way.

Verse 11b The prayer proper starts with the formal address, Holy Father. Keeping, in the sense of protects, is already a theme in the Farewell Discourse. The goal of this keeping is communion, grounded in the being of God.

Verse 12 First of all a glance back on the way Jesus had protected his followers. The one exception is Judas, whose role was an unconscious doing of God’s will in the Scriptures (see John 6:70-71; 13:10-11 and 18-19). The scripture in mind may well be Isaiah 57:4 LXX, which does mention the children of perdition. It is hard to be more precise about this mysterious verse.

Verse 13 Jesus turns towards the future. The present moment is first of all affirmed (“I am coming to you”). Then the end-time joy of the disciples comes into view. This has been emphasised since chapter 14: John 14:28; cf. 15:11; 16:20-24; 1 John 1:4. The disciples are to share Jesus’ very own joy.

Verse 14 Once again, we are looking back, starting with a strong *egō*. Word here is *logos*, so important in chapter 1. The perfect tense in Greek denotes the permanence of the gift. The “world” stands for the forces against Jesus and his followers, who share his destiny for the same reason. See John 15:18-25.

MATTHEW 6:9-13	THE LORD’S PRAYER EMBEDDED IN JOHN 17
Our Father	My father and your Father (John 20:17). Father! (John 11:41; 12:27-28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 26)
in heaven	Jesus looked up to heaven (John 11:41); Living his eyes to heaven (John 17:1)
may your name be honoured	Glorify your name (John 12:28); My Father is honoured by this, that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples. (John 15:8)
may your kingdom come	Unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3); Unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)
may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven	For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. (John 6:38)
Give us today our daily bread	Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work. (John 4:34); my Father is giving you the true bread from heaven. (John 6:32); Sir, give us this bread all the time! (John 6:34)
and forgive us our debts	Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)
as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors	“I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35) Cf. John 15:12, 17.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one	Keep them safe in your name that you have given me (John 17:11); When I was with them I kept them safe and watched over them in your name that you have given me. (John 17:12); I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them safe from the evil one. (John 17:15)

Verse 15 This is very similar to v. 11, only negatively expressed, this time. John has in mind not the abstracted principle of evil, but the personal evil one.

Verse 16 This verse repeats v. 14 substantially, taking us to the next petition.

Verse 17 Literally “consecrate” them in the truth. This is not cultic consecration but rather being made holy through Jesus’ message. Furthermore, truth here is not abstract veracity but God’s concrete loyal love and faithfulness in Jesus himself, taking us back to John 14:6. Cf. Psalm 119:142 above.

Verse 18 One of the powerful “just as” expressions in this Gospel, meaning the the mission of Jesus itself continues in the mission of the disciples.

Verse 19 Jesus own dedication or consecration of himself form the basis for the mission of the followers. Thus v. 19 complete what was begun in v. 17.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What has your experience been of

people praying on your behalf? Have you prayed for others? What difference does it all make?

2. Who are the people who cared for me and protected me? Have I been able to protect others? How does Jesus care for me and protect me?

3. Jesus wants all our joy to be complete and even to be contagious! The cost of discipleship and joy in believing are paradoxically bound in one: to live our calling fully is to discover life in abundance and, therefore, joy.

PRAYER

Father most holy, look upon this people whom you have sanctified by the dying and rising of your Son.

Keep us one in love and consecrate us in your truth, that the new life you have given us may bring us to the fullness of joy.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the first-born from the dead, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

God is love

1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This short reading (expanded here) has the most arresting affirmation in the New Testament: God is love. If ever we cease to be astonished by this...

KIND OF WRITING

Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)

I. God is light (1:5-2:27)

II. God is righteous (2:18-4:6)

III. God is love (4:7-5:12)

Epilogue: Assurances (5:13-21)

There are several themes in III and the epilogue above:

A. Love of God (4:7-12)

B. Abiding in God (4:13-21)

C. Faith in God's Son / Love (5:1-12)

ORIGIN OF THE READING

It seems clear from the letter as a whole, that the community is experiencing the hatred of "the world" in some fashion. Two other issues are outstanding: (1) There has been some kind of schism or division over the identity of Jesus as having come truly in the flesh. (2) Even within the faithful membership, some a living or no loving in ways inconsistent with the convictions of the community.

RELATED PASSAGES

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down

our lives for one another. (1 John 3:16)

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? (1 John 3:17)

Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked. (1 John 2:4-6)

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— (1 John 1:1-2)

Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father either. The person who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:23)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11 Beloved is the fitting address here given the subject matter. The writer is drawing a conclusion to the preceding discussion in vv. 7-10, in the form of a syllogism. A very similar thought can be found in 1 John 3:16 above. The following v. 17 shows the same teaching in a negative rhetorical question (also above).

Verse 12 The invisibility of God is regularly affirmed: Exodus 33:20; Matthew 5:8; John 1:18; 3:13; 6:46. We cannot "see" God by inspection or even by introspection. Instead, the writer invites us to look at our deeds, how we act and what choice we make *in reality*. The best commentary on this lapidary verse may be 1 John 2:4-6 (above). Coming to perfection has a profound background in the Gospel itself (John 4:34; 5:36; 13:1; 17:4, 23; 19:28). It is instructive and enriching to chase up the references.

Verse 13 Up to verse 12, the verbs are mostly in the past tense. From v. 13 onwards, there is a significant shift to the present tense. The community is experiencing times of testing (1 John 2:3; 3:24; 4:1) and stand in need of reassurance. The foundational reassurance has already been given: if we love one another, God

lives in us. A second one follows: the indwelling of God is assured by the presence of his Spirit. See John 14:26; 16:13-14; and also: Romans 8:9-17; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. This very Spirit is the first *gift* of the Risen Lord in John 20. To remain or to abide is also has a powerful resonance: 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 9, 14-15, 17, 24; 4:12-13, 15-16.

Verse 14 In this verse, we overhear the core catechetical vocabulary of the Johannine tradition. To *see* and to *testify*: see 1 John 1:1-2 above. God *sent* his Son: see John 3:16-17, 4:42; 12:47. Saviour occurs only here in the letter (the verb is entirely absent).

Verse 15 Abiding is linked firstly to love, then the Spirit and finally to confessing. It is clear that some at the time were *not* confessing Jesus, a concrete individual human being, as the Son of God. See 1 John 2:23 above; also 1 John 3:23-24; 5:5, 10. The creed, as a verbal expression of the mystery, is secondary to the experience of the Spirit, the conviction of the heart and the practice of love. Secondary, yes, but significant all the same. The intricate teaching of the letter combines inner experience, outward expression and shared convictions.

Verse 16a The writer summarises, using again the catechetical language of the Johannine community. The love of God comes first, as in "we love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19; see also 4:10 in the added opening verses.

Verses 16b The affirmation that God is love (repeated from v. 8) should never cease to astonish. This is a dynamic reality, naming the divine "abiding" in each believer. It is both new and not new. The corresponding affirmation in the Old Testament is a combination of Exodus 3:14 and 34:6. The newness stems from Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. When did I first discover for myself that God is love? How has this experience sustained me?

2. Being so loved, I am obliged to love in return, without hold back. Always a challenge, this leads to life in abundance.

PRAYER

God you are love in yourself and your love for us is boundless. Help us to take to heart your love for all by loving others in the same way you love us. Amen.

The election of Matthias

Acts 1:15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, 16 “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” 18 (*Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.* 19 *This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.*) 20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms,

‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” 23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This scene — a kind of interlude between the Ascension and Pentecost — is obviously important for Luke. It helps to “locate” the destiny of Judas, who betrayed the Just One (Luke 23:47; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14) and sustains the Lucan theology of the apostolic witnesses. We include vv. 18-19 to give the full picture.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a very elaborate account, of obvious significance to Luke. The unity of the Twelve, so important in the Gospel of Luke, has been shattered by the actions of Judas. The restoration of Israel, symbolised by the Twelves, included the future leadership of the restored community. Judas’ betrayal threatened not simply the integrity of the Twelve but the integrity of God’s plan. Hence we see many marks of Luke’s theology here:

the Twelve, the Holy Spirit, fulfilment of Scripture and so on.

v. 15: the setting

vv. 16-20: the rift in the Twelve.

vv. 21-22: qualifications to replace Judas.

vv.23-25: proposals and prayer.

v. 26: election, installation of Matthias.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Luke is very keen on continuity of witness as the mark of the apostles. For him, only the Twelve are apostles and even Paul is not counted as one.

RELATED PASSAGES

May their camp become desolate, their tents uninhabited. (Psalm 69:25)

Let his days become few, and may another seize his position. (Psalm 109:8 LXX)

Q. And how many residents must there be in a town so that it may be suitable for a Sanhedrin? R. One hundred and twenty (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 1:6)

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. (Luke 22:47)

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. (Psalm 16:5)

Because he will dash them speechless to the ground (Wisdom 4:19)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 15 The time marker suggests continuity with the previous scene. 120 is multiple of twelve and therefore significant. Rabbinic tradition as reported in the Mishnah suggested that 120 was the minimum for a city to host a synagogue (see above).

Verse 16 Friends is originally “men,” the standard address in the Acts. David was regarded as the author of the Psalms and, in that capacity, as a prophet. It was important for Luke that all that happened was part of a divine plan. See Luke 22:47 above.

Verse 17 Notice the emphasis even here on “numbered,” a key term in the election of Matthias. “Allotted” has a resonant background in the Old Testament, being used for the division of the tribal territories. See Psalm 16:5 above.

Verses 18-19 This parenthetical inter-

lude echoes a tradition whereby the wicked fall headlong to their destruction. See Wisdom 4:19 above. Matthew 27:3-10 offers a very different account but the expression “field of blood” is common to both. A third account is given in Papias’ *The Interpretation of the Sayings of the Lord* (an enormous swelling).

Verse 20 Two Psalms are brought to bear (see above), adjusted slightly to fit the case of Judas. In the case of Psalm 109, the Greek Old Testament is best suited to Luke’s purposes (see above).

Verses 21-22 The first word in Greek is *dei*, “it is necessary,” implying that God is the agent. Luke often demarcates Jesus ministry beginning with the baptism (Luke 3:23; 16:16; Acts 1:5; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24-25; 18:25; 19:3-4).

Verse 23 Even though this moment of replacement seems significant, neither person proposed is ever mentioned again. This may reflect the fact that the symbolism of the twelve was tied Jesus’ programme of the restoration of Israel, a limitation which waned once the Gentiles joined The Way in great numbers.

Verses 24-25 Prayer in Luke-Act: Luke 1:10; 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:39-46; Acts 10. God’s knowledge of the heart is well recognised in the Bible: Deuteronomy 8:2; LXX Psalm 7:9; 43:21; 64:6; 138:23; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 14:25; Hebrews 4:12; 1 John 3:20; Revelation 2:23. Lord refers to Jesus here.

Verse 26 The casting of lots is familiar to the Bible reader: Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; 33:54; Joshua 19:1-40; Micah 2:5; Jonah 1:7-8. Added (using a rare word found also in Acts 19:19) sustains the emphasis on numbering in this passage.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. When making a major discernment and decision, how have I sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
2. God knows *all* hearts, including mine. This can be both consoling (God knows my weakness) and challenging (God knows my compromises).
3. How am I called to be both a witness to and proclaimer of Jesus the Messiah?

PRAYER

God, you know our hearts. Help to seek your heart, your will, as we face dilemmas and decisions. Send us your Holy Spirit to guide us always. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalm 103 (102); 1 John 4:11-16; John 17:11-19

ACROSS THE READINGS

Both John 17 and 1 John 4 touch on the essentials. Who is God? How much does he love us? How can we remain in that love? Having received so much, how are we to live as result?

The great events that brought us new life in Christ are made alive in us today by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the practice of love. We cannot *know* how we are with God by inspection or even introspection. But we *can* tell by how we live.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 103 is a great prayer of thanksgivings, very suitable as our 50 days of Eastertide draw to a close.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

Choosing a replacement is a common experience and many of us have done it. What is interesting in this reading is “why” and the “how” — very different to contemporary approaches!

Second reading

1 John 4:11-16

The world of the Gospel and Letters of John can seem quite restrictive to modern eyes...and yet, here we have it: *anyone* who lives in love lives in God. Very challenging at any time and especially today.

Gospel

John 17:11-19

It is a surprise that the Fourth Gospel does not offer us the Our Father, the Lord's Prayer. If you listen carefully to John 17, however, it is clear that the writer has been inspired by Jesus' words and embedded them in this great prayer.