

Prayers:

Heavenly Father, you know us better than we know ourselves. Help us to remember that we are called to be the Body of Christ. Help us to be fervent in our prayer and worship, and loving, faithful and honest in our lives.

We pray especially for:

Sick: Dawn Forey, Ruth Gillespie, Hanna Lebrato, Marion Mason and Sue Ralfe.

RIP: William Kearns and Ken.

Make us earnest in prayer, bold in faith and loving in service. Amen.

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The Parish Office is closed.

Matthew and Jonny are continuing to say Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in their homes every day. Join them [here](#).

St John's Church

Alternative Pew Sheet

24th May 2020

Welcome!

The Church of England continues to follow Government advice. Sadly it is not possible for services, baptisms, weddings and funerals in church to take place. We also have to keep the church closed.

This is the tenth edition of our alternative pew sheet. We are committed to keeping in touch with everyone at St Johns and offer some resources: [here](#).

If you need any help or assistance from Matthew or Jonny, please be in touch (see opposite).

**"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." John 17:1**

ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST - MISSION STATEMENT

Drawn together by Christ's love, we seek by his grace to live out his commandments to love the Lord our God with all of our being; and to love everyone we come across as we love ourselves.

www.stjohnschurchstanmore.org.uk

Please do check our website for future updates

St John's

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Collect

Risen, ascended Lord, as we rejoice at your triumph, fill your Church on earth with power and compassion, that all who are estranged by sin may find forgiveness and know your peace, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Bible Readings (click on links to access passages):

[Acts 1:6-14](#)

[Psalm 68:1-10](#)

[1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11](#)

[John 17:1-11](#)

Short Sermon by Matthew Stone, Rector

2020 has been an extraordinary year. COVID-19 has forced us all to maintain physical distance, cancelling our services, keeping us apart, away from our churches and away from the Eucharist. What, then, does Jesus' prayer in the Gospel "for us all to be one" mean here, for us, in our times? How can we "be one" when we have to settle for online services, phone calls, and Zoom meetings, rather than the hugs, sacraments, and the person-to-person love to which we are so accustomed?

The church throughout history has had its share of separation sadness. The 1918 flu pandemic most recently forced churches to close in many of the same ways that we have had to close in 2020. The HIV-AIDS pandemic gave people a fear of disease and of one another, too, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Long before that, plagues would occasionally rip through the population, forcing separations and leaving sickness and death in their wake. In turbulent times, it is helpful to remember that we are not the first to walk the road before us. We are not the first church people to experience the sadness caused by separation.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus is preparing to die. He has spent a long time talking to the disciples and attempting to prepare them, as he shared supper with them and laid aside his robe like a servant, the night before he would lay down his life for his friends.

St John's

Now, it seems, he is preparing both himself and his disciples for his death, as he prays for them.

Most of us understand what it is like to be with a person as they prepare to die. We know that truths are spoken then. We know how to say goodbye. Jesus' farewell discourse (as the Gospel passage is called) is more relatable in its Holy Week context than it perhaps is here, in the Easter Season, after the Ascension.

Perhaps one thing this CV-19 pandemic has done for us is to point out that we do not often know how to be separate but still united. As we read this passage in light of the Ascension, we realise that that is exactly what Jesus is preparing them for - to remain united with him, and with each other, even when he is not physically present. Later in this chapter of John, Jesus will say, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Crisis teaches us truths. This is true of the disciples at the time of Jesus' death, and it is true of us here in 2020. In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself is the Word made flesh, the truth made flesh. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the disciples learn that the worst thing is never the last thing, but that in Christ, all things are made new. In our own time, perhaps, we are learning similar things.

When Christ ascended, the disciples looked around at each other, and the sky, such that the angels standing by asked them, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11). It is ok not to know what to do next. It is ok to be still. It is ok to put one foot in front of the other and muddle through. And it is ok to be taken aback by physical separation from those we love and whose presence comforts us and lifts us up.

I wonder if this pandemic can teach us more than how to better wash our hands. Perhaps it can truly teach us to be one in Christ with people with whom we may never be physically present in this life.

Perhaps it can serve as a reminder that regardless, we are all one in Christ, and Christ is with us, now and always. In Christ, neither death, nor life, nor pandemics, nor wars can ever separate us. Amen.