**The Revd Dr Ian McIntosh, Director of Mission and Ministry, reflects on John 17.20-26 for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, 1st June.**

Saying goodbye to someone we care for and appreciate is a very precious gift. Words spoken when a much-loved colleague leaves a job can be an opportunity to express what we've valued about them. The same is true when we say goodbye to a friend who is moving house. Even more so might be the words expressed when someone is coming towards the end of their life, and we want to thank them for all that they have given to us.

In our gospel reading, we hear the conclusion of Jesus’s farewell words. They’re spoken to his disciples only a few days before his death. They are his opportunity to say the things that matter to his disciples, words that he wants them to remember. It's significant that they come in the form of a prayer, of a deep longing from Jesus, for what he desires that his disciples might be and do.

At the core of this longing is something very simple: “Be one people,” he prays, “so that the world might believe.” ‘Be one people’ doesn't perhaps quite get to the radical implication of what Jesus is saying. This ‘oneness’ is about an intimacy that would have been very shocking to their first hearers. Just as God is one, just as Jesus and God the creator are one, so the disciples are to be one. Their unity, their purpose and commitment to each other and to the world, stem from the fact that they abide in Jesus. It's a closeness to God and a closeness of God to them that's expressed in words of love. Just as Jesus has been loved by God, so Jesus loves his disciples, and his disciples are to love one another.

Loving one another is key here; the key to all discipleship, the key to witnessing to the world that the God who we believe in and follow loves unconditionally the world that God has made.

But this loving one another is hard work. It's hard work when we disagree about things that we regard as important. It's hard work when people misunderstand us or they act in a hurtful way to us. But working at this loving is a sign of recognising and valuing the presence of Christ in those who are different from us. One way that I try to do this is to ask myself the question, what is it that I can learn about deepening my own discipleship from you who are different from me?

In these days before Pentecost, we are invited as a world Church to join in Christ's longing for the people of God to be one as a sign of the coming of God's kingdom. But with all this, as with all these longings, it has a bigger destination in sight. Our loving one another is part of enabling the world to believe. This is the point of our loving, the point of working at it, that we might enable others to believe.

So, from the time of Jesus onwards, one test of the capacity of the Christian community to witness to that love has been our ability to be united. We've not always got this right, but in a world that at the moment is so torn apart by injustice, wars, and inhumanity, we need to recapture that loving kindness for each other that can be so attractive. Jesus leaves his disciples with this simple message of loving and longing, as powerful as it was 2000 years ago, as it is today. ‘Be one people so that the world may believe.’

Let us pray. Loving God, we long for your kingdom to come. Your kingdom to come especially in frail and fractured parts of the world. We cry out today for love and compassion for the people of Gaza and Ukraine and other suffering parts of the world. We cry out to you too, for us as the Christian people of God to be one. Give us a depth of love, respect, and understanding for each other, that through that, the world might believe. May your kingdom come. May your will be done. Amen.