

On Thursday we marked 'Ascension Day' when Christ ascended into heaven after revealing himself to the disciples over a forty day period, and was then exalted to the right hand of the Father. Today is also a special day as the world over celebrates Mother's Day. Mothers give us a glimpse of God through their sacrificial love for their children. We are truly grateful to God for God's love being reflected through them.

As Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promised Holy Spirit to be poured out upon all of them. It is only with the power of the Spirit that the disciples would be able to witness to Jesus beginning from Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth. The theme for this morning, "The ascended Lord upholds those who are united to him by faith", indicates that Jesus himself would be the one who would uphold them as they testify to his name.

John records for us in the high priestly prayer of Jesus the intercession that Jesus makes for his disciples. He pleads with the Father that as he was going to leave the world very shortly, the Father was to protect them from all the attacks of the evil one. Jesus prays for unity among the believers and hopes that they would be one just as he and the Father are one. The world represents unbelief and rejection of Jesus and his followers. They will hate and persecute the followers of Jesus. The disciples will be exposed to hatred, persecution, temptation to do evil and to death. However, the ascended Lord upholds those who are united to him by faith. Jesus is constantly interceding for us at the right hand of the Father and therefore, we can take courage that he is watching over us.

Jesus then prays that the Father will keep them in his love and protection. Jesus addresses God as Holy Father-appealing to God's holiness, the essential nature of God which is able to preserve his followers in moral purity and unity. By appealing to the name of God Jesus is talking about the character of God. When the disciples are kept under the active power of one name, they all became one, in spite of their different backgrounds, temperaments, outlooks and gifts. He is reminding us that we are all members of the one family because we have all been baptised with the same Spirit. In our world today disunity is one of the biggest problems that Christians face all over the world. As long as Christians fight one against the other, the devil is happy. But if we are united great things can be done. That is the reason why Jesus prayed first and foremost for the unity of Christians.

Jesus then in his prayer says that he has given them the Word which protects them and which sanctifies them. Jesus prays that God would protect his disciples because the world hates them as they do not belong to the world just as he did not belong to the world. The world is symbolic of unbelief, rebellion and rejection of Jesus and his followers. However, the prayer of Jesus is that God would not take them out of the world but to protect them from the evil one.

Jesus calls us to be like the salt of the earth. The place of the salt is in the cooking pot and not to be in isolated little ecclesiastical salt-cellars. Our work is in the midst of the world and not just within the church. Jesus therefore, prays for protection from the evil one who is always on the prowl to devour us.

Jesus then goes on to pray that his disciples would be sanctified by the truth. The truth that he is referring to is the Word of God. The Word of God, both the written word and the revealed Word helped the disciples to be rooted and grounded in Jesus. The Word tells us that Jesus came into this world to suffer for us so that we might have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal. This is the truth that the Word leads us into. The prayer of Jesus is that his followers will be sanctified by the truth. The verb 'to be sanctified' means 'to set apart' or 'to consecrate' for the purpose of carrying out God's appointed task. Jesus therefore, is praying that all of us his followers would truly be sanctified and set apart so that we will be able to fulfil the task for which he has called us.

Jesus says, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." The mission of the disciples is the mission of Jesus and Jesus' mission is the mission of God. This mission of God was to send his Son Jesus into this world to save it from perishing from sin and darkness. Jesus came into the world to reveal who God is in all his glory. Now he departs to the Father, but God's mission in the world will not cease. God will communicate his love for human beings through the followers of Jesus who are left behind.

As we mark this 'Ascension day' as well as Mother's Day, may we truly be people who will reveal the love of God to others through our lifestyles. May we also take courage in the fact that Jesus is constantly interceding for our protection and has also given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to be overcomers in the world.