

The Sunday after Ascension (Seventh Sunday after Easter)

Praying with Confidence

[John 17:1-11](#), [Acts 1:6-14](#)

Do you remember the old toothpaste adverts where, with a bright “ting!” the smiling voiceover promised “The ring of confidence”? Everything would be absolutely fine if you just brushed regularly with that particular brand of toothpaste.

Except I can remember watching one of those adverts after a particularly painful visit to the dentist, and my confidence felt very badly dented. Sometimes, the shiny brightness of an advert offering you such an assuring vision of perfection makes you deeply discouraged, even cynical.

Yet what does that word “confidence” really mean? Does it imply that we can expect every day to be a good one?

When we say The Lord’s Prayer together, it is often introduced with the words, “We pray with confidence”. These words do not mean that we should be self-confident. Nor do they mean that any fears, pain or doubts which I may be experiencing make the prayer invalid or improper in some way. We pray with faith alone, putting ourselves, our personal situations and feelings before God. We simply wait and trust, utterly dependent upon God. We find words to meet with him, given to us by Jesus.



The account of Jesus’ ascension in Acts and the disciples’ return from the Mount of Olives to the upper room in Jerusalem is a demonstration of confidence. The disciples are not excitedly telling people what they have seen at this stage, but are waiting expectantly, prayerfully, confidently.

Jesus tells them, “wait for the gift my father promised”. (v. 4)

They don’t know precisely what they are waiting for, but there is a sense of gathering purpose. “They all joined constantly in prayer, along with the women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (v. 14) The group is very mixed, but all gathered for the same purpose. There is a sense that Jesus’ prayer asking that his people “may be one” (John 17: 11) is

being lived out as men, women, members of Jesus’ very own family all join together to pray. Something big is about to happen.

If they are expecting all their troubles to be removed, or that this will be the time when Jesus will “restore the kingdom to Israel” in terms of earthly rule, they are much mistaken. They have to wait and be entirely dependent upon God; his timing and his choice of gift. All they can know from their experience is that Jesus’ words are true and trustworthy.

Our Gospel reading shows us how Jesus asks God to protect the disciples, (v.11) but protection does not mean that risks, pain or danger are taken away completely. The disciples will endure great hardships for their faith. They are not given a way out from these, but the assurance of God’s presence with them in the midst of their troubles.

They wait and pray with confidence. We do not have any clues about how they might have felt in that nine-day period of prayer between the Ascension and Pentecost, but their faith spurs them on; not to frantic activity, but simply staying together, waiting. That waiting is not passive, but a deliberate, watchful and constant state of being present and ready for whatever God is going to do next. They remain in the presence of God.

As we wait through this period between Ascension and Pentecost, we are also encouraged to use it as a time to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, that he would inspire us, and also to ask for his presence with people we know, and in our world at large. There are lots of resources available on the Thy Kingdom Come website: www.thykingdomcome.global

We too are called to spend time waiting on, and waiting for God. No matter how we might be feeling, we can pray with confidence – with faith – knowing that God is with us, loves us and wants to protect us. Even when the words may be hard to find, we can simply sit quietly and ask God to be with us. We can follow the words that Jesus taught us, knowing that they cover all our needs. Jesus knows us intimately: he knows our weaknesses, as we make mistakes and hurt others as they hurt us, but he shows us how to let go of those injuries through giving and receiving forgiveness, and by letting God have his rightful place in our lives and the world.

It is in such ways that we, along with those first disciples, can have confidence.

As we wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, you may find this prayer helpful:

Move our hearts with the calm, smooth flow of your grace.
Let the river of your love run through our souls.
May my soul be carried by the current of your love,
Towards the wide, infinite ocean of heaven.
Stretch out my heart with your strength,
As you stretch out the sky above the earth.
Smooth out any wrinkles of hatred or resentment.
Enlarge my soul that it may know more fully your truth.

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