

Glorify my name

John 17: 1-11

Over the years, much has been written and sung of goodbyes. In the 60s, the Beatles released a song of few lyrics except for the very catchy phrase of the title *'Hello, Goodbye'*; in the 80s, Bon Jovi sang *'Never can say goodbye'* and in the 90s, Dolly Parton produced *'I'll never say goodbye'*.

But saying goodbye is part and parcel of life. Throughout all of our lives, whatever our age, we will be saying goodbye to people and places as life moves on. Over the last ten years, it feels as if I've said goodbye many times. In 2010, I said goodbye to a work team that I'd enjoyed leading for six years. But it was a very reluctant and sad goodbye because the circumstances of our parting had been caused by re-organisation and redundancy. Three years later, I said a very different goodbye to a new work team as I left to take up my curacy in Oundle, near Peterborough. And then, three years on, another goodbye as I left Oundle to come to the Ely Diocese. That was a goodbye tinged with both joy and sadness: the joy of a new post, but sadness at leaving behind the many friends I'd made in those early years of ministry.

Common sense tells us that saying goodbye is really important. Saying goodbye allows us time to honour the importance that we have in each other's lives. It gives us the opportunity to put words to feelings that we might be recognising for the very first time. A good goodbye honours our past and makes sense of the choices that we've made; it recognises life experiences with others and the world around us, and provides closure as we move on to our next chapter.

However, when life comes at us such that we do not get a chance to say goodbye, or we are not ready to say goodbye, we can be left wondering what was, what happened, and what could have been. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, many opportunities for good goodbyes will have been missed as children and students complete their time at school and university without those proper endings of proms and balls and teary goodbyes.

Others will have sadly lost loved ones and the goodbyes will have been very different. This can leave a hole filled with heavy difficult feelings, such as regret, guilt, anger, confusion and fear, that only time will heal. I wonder what

the goodbyes in your life have been and how they have made you feel, both the ones you've welcomed and the ones you haven't.

Jesus seemed to know a lot about the importance of goodbyes. In our reading from John's gospel today, he's preparing his disciples for his return to God the Father. The passage begins with, *'After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed'* and you might wonder what it was he'd just said. In the previous chapter, he's told the disciples that he is going home to the one who sent him, and that it is for their good that he's going away, because after he has returned to his Father, the Holy Spirit will come to them. He knows however that they are going to be lost without him and he recognises this but gives them hope for the future by saying *'Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy.'* He gives words to how they will be feeling – that goodbyes hurt, but reassures them they won't always feel this way.

After Jesus has comforted and reassured his disciples, he looks towards heaven and prays. Many churches, including our own, say prayers for those who are leaving – perhaps they are moving away from the area, or going on a long journey overseas. But, most of the time, it's the person who is leaving that these prayers are about. But *Jesus* is the one going away, and *he* is the one who did the praying – for those who were staying, his disciples. Jesus wanted them to know that they were not being abandoned, and that he would always be with them – and he says this in his prayer. This is the last prayer that the disciples will hear Jesus pray for them, and it contains everything they need.

It starts with Jesus acknowledging that the time has come for him to fulfil his purpose on earth: *'Father, the time has come,'* he says. *'Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.'* And we know, looking back, that it is the crucifixion, for all its horror and darkness, that will be the hour in which Jesus is glorified. Jesus has also glorified his Father by finishing the work he was sent to do. Jesus even says that he has been glorified in his disciples – *'And glory has come to me through them,'* he prays. What a wonderful last thing for the disciples to hear. How beautifully affirming.

But Jesus knows that there will be difficult times ahead for them, and that they will be unsettled by his leaving. *'Holy Father, protect them,'* he urges. *'Protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be as one, as we are one.'* And here we get an inkling of the depth of love that Jesus has for his disciples. He knows what is about to happen, but he puts his

disciples' welfare before his own imminent suffering and death. He puts their needs well above his own. Not only do we get a glimpse of the love Jesus has for his disciples, but also the intimacy between Jesus and God that is almost unfathomable. In verse 5, Jesus says, *'And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.'* And here we're reminded of the beginning of John's gospel: *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.'* This close, intimate relationship that has lasted an eternity, before the world even began. But, in this prayer, Jesus isn't asking for a return to a heavenly status quo where he can forget that he was ever born of Mary and spent 33 years on earth; he's praying for a new situation of increased knowledge and glory, where the disciples are included in the relationship between Father and Son. Remember those words from John chapter 14, verse 20: *'I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.'* A beautiful relationship with the Father and the Son that is for each and every one of us.

I love that Jesus' last prayer for his disciples is such a personal prayer that meets their very needs at the time. Jesus knows what they will be feeling and prays right into that situation. *'I pray for them'* he says in verse 9 and 11. *'I will remain in the world no longer ... but they are still in the world. So, protect them Holy Father, by the power of your name.'* He wants them to know that they will *not* be abandoned, even though he is leaving them, that he will always be with them.

And Jesus is still praying for his disciples today. He knows our struggles, particularly during these dark times of global pandemic. St Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans (8:34) that *'Jesus Christ, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.'* Jesus is praying for us. Today.

I wonder what you think Jesus' prayer for us might be. What his prayer for *you* might be.

I think I'd like Jesus' prayer for me to be much the same as it was for those first disciples: that I would know God the Father as Jesus knew him, and that by knowing him I would have eternal life. I'd also like Jesus to pray that I would be protected by the power of God's name, and that I would be one with other Christians, as God the Father and Jesus the Son are one. What a wonderful prayer to hear, and a wonderful prayer to receive. Amen.