

**Sermon for May 16 2021** *The Rev. Mary Bell-Plouffe*

There's a book on my book shelf.  
I've had it for nearly 40 years.  
It's a paperback, the cover is faded,  
and falling apart;  
tape holds it together.  
It's written by Father Jim Wolff, a Benedictine priest who died 4 years ago.  
The book is a commentary on John's gospel,  
the first biblical commentary I ever read.

It's a really good book  
accessible, knowledgeable  
and because I've had it so long  
and because it's such a good resource  
it's the book in my library  
that I've referred to more than any other book.  
The title is 'As I Have Loved You'.  
from Jesus' commandment -- love one another as I have loved you.

*As I Have Loved You*--to me that's a pretty good summary of John's gospel.

The word "**love**" appears 57 times in the Gospel of John,  
more than in the other three gospels combined.  
And the word 'love' appears 46 times in the First Epistle **of John**.  
In John's gospel and in his letters  
love for Christ results in the following of his commandments.  
And his commandment...  
**is to love.**  
We heard that loud and clear in last Sunday's gospel -  
**'Love one another as I have loved you.'**

In John's gospel, at the Last Supper,  
there's no account of Jesus taking bread and wine,  
and giving it to his disciples saying  
*This is my body, this is my blood*.  
Instead, John recounts the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.  
That happens in chapter 13, and then for the next 4 chapters, chapter 14-17,  
John has Jesus teaching his disciples one last time.  
some of the most beautiful and comforting passages in all of scripture:

‘Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.  
In my Father’s house are many dwelling places.

‘If you love me, you’ll keep my commandments  
and I’ll ask the Father, and he’ll give you another Advocate,  
to be with you forever. This is the spirit of truth....

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you...On that day you will know  
that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you.

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,  
and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Today is the third and final Sunday when we hear part of these teachings.  
Matthew, Mark and Luke all have an account of Jesus teaching his disciples to pray  
what we call the ‘Lord’s Prayer’.

John doesn’t have that. But in this morning’s gospel  
we hear **Jesus** at prayer.

Jesus is praying - out loud, as is the custom.

He’s talking to the Father; and his disciples and we,  
are able to listen in on his prayer.

*Holy Father, protect them in your name, that you have given me,  
so that they may be one, as we are one. (vs 11)*

*I ask not only on behalf of these,  
but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word  
that they may all be one.*

*As you, Father are in me and I am in you,  
may they also be in us,  
so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’*

Jesus has given a new commandment  
- love one another as I have loved you.

Now he prays  
protect them; protect us; so that we may all be one.

Jesus must have known how hard that would be  
for us to be one.

It’s his final prayer, before they go to the garden  
and Jesus is arrested.

Jesus prayers that ' we may all be one'.  
How hard it is.

Our passage from chapter 1 of Acts has the early church working cooperatively to choose a replacement for Judas. Chapter 2 tells us that the early believers shared everything in common. But by chapter 5 we have the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who lie to the disciples. And in Chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas, that's St. Paul and St. Barnabas have such a sharp disagreement that they part company and there's nothing in scripture to indicate that they ever reconcile.

And Jesus prays -Protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one'

This Sunday is Jerusalem Sunday, and if you've been following the news you know how desperately Jerusalem is in need of our prayers. The conflict and violence between Israel and Palestinians continues to escalate. But there's another conflict in Jerusalem of which you may not be aware. This is a longstanding conflict between Christians, and it's focus is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus is to have been buried.

Since the 18th century The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been managed jointly by six different denominations: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic and Ethiopian. These denominations account for more than half of the world's Christian population. And yet they can't get along.

Each denomination controls different parts of the church, each guarding its own patch with a jealousy which often gives rise to squabbling and open warfare.

In 2002, in the heat of the summer, an Egyptian monk guarding an area of Coptic territory moved his chair out of the sun to a shadier area. This turned out to fall under Ethiopian jurisdiction, leading to a fight so fierce that eleven monks had to be hospitalised.

In 2004, during a procession to commemorate the discovery of Christ's cross, a Greek Orthodox priest took exception to a Roman Catholic chapel being left open. The ensuing fracas between Greek Orthodox and Franciscan monks resulted in spilt blood and arrests.

In April 2008, priests, worshippers and Israeli police were all involved in a brawl after some Armenian priests tried to eject a Greek priest whom they considered to be gatecrashing their procession. Participants beat each other with the palm fronds they were bearing in commemoration of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

The Feast of the Cross in 2008 saw further confrontation when Greek Orthodox priests tried to block an Armenian procession, viewing it as a threat to their guardianship of Christ's tomb. Injuries, arrests and damage to church ornaments ensued.

It would be laughable, if it wasn't so tragic.  
Is it any wonder that so many people write off Christianity as irrelevant?  
And Jesus prays *-Protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one'*

I knew an Anglican clergyman, whose father was also an Anglican clergyman. They were estranged from each other for years -- bitterly disagreeing about the appropriate garb to wear for leading worship.

I did a google search this week, and according to my search, there's more than 75 Christian churches in Peterborough, 11 churches in Campbellford 3 in Hastings and 2 in Roseneath. Imagine for a moment, what a force for good and for change we would be if we could only get over our differences and get on with building and being the kingdom of God? Imagine the financial resources we would have if we sold some of these properties and used the money for ministry? Affordable housing; childcare; food security programmes the list is endless! Imagine, if we focussed , not on what divides us, but on what unites us? Jesus prays *Protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one'* Imagine if we truly **were one?**

That doesn't mean we all have to be the same.  
That doesn't mean we all have to be identical.  
That doesn't mean we always have to agree on everything.  
But the bottom line is, **we are one.**

I was reading last week, that The Toronto Catholic District Schoolboard has voted to fly the Pride flag over schools for the month of June. I see that as a step toward answering Jesus prayer that we be all be one..

This week, German catholic priests are defying the Vatican  
and blessing same-sex couples  
in 100 churches across the country.

I see that as a step toward answering Jesus prayer  
that we all be one.

And there's a growing movement about removing the patent on Covid -19 vaccines  
so that they will be more accessible for everyone, around the world.

I see that as a step toward answering Jesus prayer  
that we may all be one.

Jesus is about to leave the upper room and go to the garden.

He knows he will be arrested; he knows that he will die.

He's given them a new commandment- love one another  
as I have loved you.

His final prayer is for his disciples and for us:

Jesus prays 'protect them from the evil one, so that they may all be one'.

This is the culmination of his relationship with his disciples.

It's the point of transition from him being with them

to him being with God. Jesus prays, and Jesus continues to pray

**Protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one'  
Amen.**