

Day 6: 'Welcoming others'

"Go and bear fruit that will last"

(John 16:15b)

Hello everyone, and welcome to day 6 of our week of prayer for Christian Unity.

I recognise for some of you that this may be a strange or different way of connecting with God, but I hope and pray that you find this material useful as you set this time aside to worship, pray and reflect. Although we are separated geographically, we recognise that we worship a God who is not bound by walls and space, but a God who is ever present and meets us wherever we are! May God bless you as you set time aside to receive from Him.

Today we are invited to join together as the Body of Christ in prayer. As we prepare our hearts and minds to do that, I invite you to listen/sing along to the song 'Good, Good Father' as we centre our hearts and minds on God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ak0OoFBw3c>

Silent prayer

As we have journeyed on our theme all week of 'abiding in Christ', we recognise how this only becomes possible by an inward attitude that takes root in us over time. It demands space to grow, but we can probably all acknowledge from our own experience that it can be overtaken by the struggle of keeping up with the necessities of life and it can be threatened by the distractions, noise, activity and the challenges of life.

Genesis 18:1-5: Abraham hosts the angels at the Oak of Mamre

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

3 He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant". "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."



Mark 6:30-44: Jesus' compassion for the crowds

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Meditation

When we allow ourselves to be transformed by Christ, his love in us grows and bears fruit. Welcoming others is a concrete way of sharing God's love which is reflected through us.

Throughout his life, Jesus welcomed those he met whether they initially knew him as Saviour or not. He listened to them, embraced them and let himself be touched by them without being afraid of their suffering.

In the gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus is moved with compassion after seeing the hungry crowd. He knows that the entire human person must be nourished, and that he alone can truly satisfy the hunger for bread and the thirst for life. But he does not wish to do this without his disciples, without that little something they can help him with: distributing five loaves and two fish.



Even today Jesus draws us to be co-workers in his unconditional care. Sometimes something as small as a kind smile, a listening ear, a card of encouragement or our presence is enough to make a person feel welcome and valued. When we offer ourselves to Jesus, whether that be our abilities, our passions, our hopes and dreams, our failings and our strengths, we do so, knowing that he can and he will use them in a surprising way for his Kingdom and his glory.

By welcoming others, we are then able to experience what Abraham did, for it is by giving that we receive, and when we welcome others, we are blessed in abundance. We don't give so that we may receive something in return. Instead, as people of God, we seek to live a life like Jesus so that we may help grow God's Kingdom here on earth and point to the light.

“Will the people we welcome day after day find in us men and women radiant with Christ, our peace?”

[The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 60]

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, we desire to be unified as your people, help us to welcome fully our brothers and sisters in Christ. You know how we can often feel helpless in the face of each other's suffering, but would you give us hearts of compassion like Jesus? We are reminded today that you are always there ahead of us, you surround us by your Holy Spirit and you equip us to be the people you need us to be. May we be people of light to our neighbours, and may you speak to others through our words, support others through our actions, and let your blessing rest on us all. Amen.

For personal reflection:

- When you meet new people, do they find you “radiant with Christ”?
- As we pray together for greater unity how are we showing Christ's welcome to other Christians?
- What are people hungry for in your community? How could you be praying into this matter?

Go and Do:

Global: Take time to engage with global news stories today. Take action in response to the story that most moves you with compassion.

Local: Contribute in any way that you can to a foodbank, food growing scheme or community meal initiative in your area.

Personal: Reflect on and identify who 'the other' is for you. How might you connect with and offer a welcome to them in your next encounter?

