

Reflection on John 17:20-26

God, please quieten my mind, and guide my words.

There are times when my wife and I would like our children to be more helpful. There are floors to vacuum, tables to be set, or cleared, clothes to be folded and messes of pillows, blankets and a variety of toys to be tidied away to make the living room accessible. We would like that, but we don't always get it. This can lead to frustration.

We know they are capable of all of these things, and yet they choose to spend their time differently. Our expectations do not always align with our children's needs and desires, leading us into annoyance and even resentment. This of course is not our children's problem, it is ours, the parents. We would like our children to be participants in our family life, and ultimately in the life of their community, to go forth into the world as leaders, citizens, neighbours and friends. Housework is preparation for such participation. So we assume.

When we have expectations of others, and those others have their own ideas, we can feel let down, in certain circumstances perhaps even betrayed. In families this can work both ways, of course. Do I live up to my children's expectations of me? Did my parents live up to mine? How about my wife's expectations of me, or mine for her?

None of this is about other people though. I can only take responsibility for my own part. Still, it takes great effort to let go of one's own expectations, to accept things, and people just as they are; it's an effort that sometimes seems super-human. It is perhaps only achieved through faith.

The prayer in John 17, considered by some to be 'the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth' can be understood in three parts:

1. Jesus prays to be glorified
2. Jesus prays for His disciples
3. Jesus prays for all believers, and potential believers

It is the third part, verses 20-26, that makes up our reading today. After Jesus has prayed for Himself, and for His disciples, He prays that His disciples will in turn lead others to God. And He prays this knowing full well they are not yet ready for such work.

In modern terms this would be considered delegation. Jesus, knowing He will be leaving the earth is delegating the earthly work of conversion to His disciples. Our own delegation always comes from a place of trust: a confidence that those to whom we delegate are willing, capable and competent; such trust has been evidenced through experience, and the trust earned.

Jesus' disciples, often bewildered or misguided, have offered little in the way of such evidence, yet their Master trusts them wholly and completely. This shows Jesus's great faith: faith in God, of course, but perhaps more vitally His faith in humankind. Jesus' disciples, the named ones at least, are about to let Him down: Judas by betrayal, Peter by denial, Thomas by doubt, others by falling asleep, or scattering in fear. The disciples, just like all of us, are flawed, imperfect people.

Jesus knows this, He anticipates their weaknesses, and the impact it will have on Him personally, and still He prays for them, with deep love and an unshakeable belief that their failings are temporary and that those who follow Him, for whatever their initial reasons, will come through their bewilderment into a new understanding, will soon rise up, and praise His name. Jesus shows both belief and confidence that this motley crew of followers will be His voice after He is gone, will be God's channel to all nations and all people.

There are moments I have such faith in my children, but there are plenty more moments when my faith is clouded with doubt, and fear. The verses we read today can serve as a reminder for all of us to have faith in our fellow human, to channel God's great love, rather than our own small, self-interested doubt and fear. Our children, like Jesus's disciples, will rise up to their responsibilities when they are ready. This will be in their time, in God's time, not in mine.

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