

The entire Easter season of 50 days is rich with events that bring to bear the beginning of a new era in salvation history in the Christian faith.

For the first forty days after the resurrection, the risen Jesus is back in the world among his friends and disciples, offering his final teaching.

Jesus presence during these 40 days is known collectively as the resurrection appearances.

After the 40 days comes the Ascension, the time when Jesus departs from the earthly realm proclaimed in the Gospel of Luke and in the first chapter of the book of Acts.

With Jesus' Ascension there is a sense of ending and thankfully a beginning – an end to his time on earth and a beginning of the Church, which awaits his return.

Ten days after the Ascension, in a fiery descent the promised Holy Spirit comes among us.

Christians celebrate this as Pentecost, the birthday of the church.

Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost and then the 50 days of the Easter season closes.

Through the pattern of scripture readings during the 50 days of Easter we are taken to and from different events gleaning from the narrative a yield that feeds and deepens our understanding of our Christian faith. It is for many, the most important season in our calendar, for reflection, meditation and learning.

Today the lectionary takes us back to chapter 17 of John's gospel, to the eve of the crucifixion when Jesus prays for the disciples and for future believers.

Since early church tradition this prayer has been known as a "high priestly prayer" referring to the intercession the High Priest made before God for the whole people. It is also known as a prayer of consecration in which Jesus consecrates himself, his disciples and the future church. In the prayer that we hear today Jesus prays for his first and future believers – for us.

It is a most beautiful prayer which sanctifies each of us and also corporately as the church. It is of comfort I believe to remember in our times of darkness and trouble that Jesus has prayed for us personally.

The strongest theme in the prayer is about the oneness of divine love into which we are called. In the oneness of love we exude that which holds us all together - for its source is not in human need, or human longing or human effort but in the heart of God. It belongs to the same love that Jesus has for us in the Father.

Now during the week I re-read a book by Cynthia Bourgeault called *Wisdom Jesus*. Cynthia is an episcopal priest, author and theologian. In her book she writes that in the mystical wisdom tradition, oneness in Christ means living a love that draws and integrates all separateness to itself, not by force or doctrine but simply by the presence of self-giving love.

To shed some light on this understanding, Cynthia casts our minds back to the time after the crucifixion, to Jesus time in the tomb before the resurrection. Now there are several understandings about where and what Jesus did during this time. In the apostles creed we say that he descended to the dead.

According to medieval tradition he entered the realms of hell and freed those in bondage there. Coming from the thoughts of a great medieval mystic, Jacob Boehme, Cynthia arrives at an understanding that Jesus does descend into the darkness and there he holds all change, circumstance and time together in loves warm embrace.

She suggests that he just sits in the deep darkness of falseness not judging, not fixing, just **letting it be** in love. His quiet, harmonising love infiltrated even the deepest places of blackness, in a way that doesn't override them or cancel them, but gently reconnects them to the oneness of love.¹ This, suggests Cynthia Bourgeault, is the mystical meaning of the great Pauline statement in Colossians "in him all things hold together".

I'm sure many of us know something of this experience when we sit with someone who is experiencing troubled times. Christ's loving presence at one with our own presence, free of judgement or the need to fix things, helps to bring the troubled person into a place of wholesomeness in which they are better equipped to respond to their situation.

The good news in the narrative from Acts this morning the name and the person and the love of Jesus lets us become our true selves – not possessed, not occupied, not driven, not fragmented.

In today's gospel passage Jesus prays that the world will believe. He wants everyone, in spite of the many who reject his way to come to believe and to know that God has sent him to reveal God as a God of love. By being drawn to his disciples, people will be drawn to him and so to his Father.

It will be the divine communion that binds his disciples together, that will reveal to the world his love and so bring them to open their hearts to the love of God. What a wonderful image.

As the psalter sings out today – *The Lord is king, let the earth rejoice in bringing Gods love to others.*

The Lord be with you.

¹ Cynthia Bourgeault. *Wisdom Jesus*, Shambhala, Boston 2008. P 123.