



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  
Diocese of Chelmsford

## **The Seventh Sunday of Easter**

*“Prayer humbles us as needy, and exalts God as wealthy”*

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Acts 1:6-14

John 17:1-11

The Revd Canon Rod Reid  
Braintree Area Dean

Amongst the many joys of parish ministry is the variety of contexts I can find myself in on day. One morning last week, I went from a school assembly to a care home visit, then to our weekly Friday Café, and then onto a Zoom meeting. My visit to the care home was particularly profound on this occasion. After leading a short communion service in one of the lounges I usually do a few room visits for those who, for all sorts of reasons, can't join us.

On those visits, I went to see a lady who was bed bound, we chatted and caught up on what's been happening with her and her family since we last spoke. To draw our time together, I offered a few prayers and closed with the Lord's Prayer after which I left. As I went down the corridor, I heard a voice say, 'Excuse me'. I traced it back down the corridor to the room opposite where I had been. The lovely man I met, also bed bound, said I feel I need to say that when I heard the Lord's Prayer I joined in, I hope you don't mind? Well, of course I didn't mind, and with his permission I sat with him. It turned out that he wasn't a churchgoer but at this stage in his life, he said I feel lost, I don't know what to do, and then I heard you praying, so I joined in. We said the Lord's Prayer again together, and the whole thing was deeply moving. For me, it was a timely reminder of the power of prayer, and the power of God at work in our lives. I share that story, because it is one of those situations where we see God is the one doing the work, I just knew afterwards that God wanted me there at that moment, and it felt an answer to prayer for us both.

As we turn to our gospel reading today one of the key themes for me is once again the power of prayer, and that need for connectedness with God. Here by chapter 17 we find Jesus preparing his disciples for a time when they will be without him. In fact, all of chapters 13 to the end of 17 are a goodbye – they could be called “the long goodbye”, a good name for a film perhaps! Sandwiched between the raising of Lazarus – an echo of what's to come – and Jesus' betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, these chapters are charged with the emotion of a painful but necessary farewell, a goodbye.

And in chapter 17, Jesus rounds it all off with a prayer, and what a prayer it is! The first part of the prayer cements Jesus' credentials. It's not just a matter of being received by God in heaven. Jesus is returning home to the glory he had with God in the beginning (remember those opening words in John's Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...”). Jesus has told them before that he and the Father are one; now he again claims God's glory as his own.

Then he prays for his followers: those who have believed that he is the Son of God, and who very soon will find themselves the keepers and tellers of the message. Jesus' oneness with God is extended to the believers. Somehow, this little band of rather unsure humans have become bound up with God in Christ. From that point on there is an unshakeable bond between God and humankind – something wholly different about the way that human beings relate to God.

And then it all gets much simpler: a prayer for protection. Jesus must know that the hatred that he is about to experience will soon be extended to them. They haven't always been shining examples of steady faith; how will they cope without him?

This beautiful farewell, this beautiful prayer speaks to us as well. The words may not dwell as deeply or come as easily as the Lord's Prayer, but it is no less powerful, with key themes that need to be part of our prayers too.

Unity, truth, love in action, and of course protection too. At the heart of the prayer is a call to recognise our connectedness, oneness with God. Jesus' words to his disciples still echo across the centuries, a Galilean peasant claims to be one with God, and something in the fabric of the universe shifts.

Through what would follow, his death and resurrection, humankind and God are bound together when they were once set apart, and an unshakeable bond is formed that cannot be broken by human frailty and petty mistakes. Things are possible that were never possible before. Things will change that we never thought would change.

The message here for us in this prayer is that we are loved by God. How?

Well, in exactly the same way that he loves his Son. That knowledge, those words are not hidden away like Terms and Conditions. Those words are not just informative, thanks for the heads up, similar to other advice like bring a brolly. They are astounding, life changing, universe altering words. You are loved by God; in the same way he loves his Son. To truly abide in that love, we are called to pray.

Does that mean we will be shielded from everything harmful? No, Jesus, his son was certainly not. Does it mean we can be protected from the pain of the world? No, again Jesus, nor his followers escaped that. But, it does mean that all will be well in the end. It does mean that through all life can throw at us, in our hellos and goodbyes, God loves us. That offers us freedom to be brave, to be courageous, to love others in the same way. A transformative love, and one the world really does need right now.

It is that attitude we must bring to our prayer lives too. Inspired by the power of prayer seen here, the power of prayer for and in our churches and Diocese, and the power of prayer in our own faith too. Since Ash Wednesday, and following the invitation of Bishop Guli, the Diocese have been following 100 days of Prayer, that will conclude in just over a week or so. A call to prayer for us all, acknowledging its transformational power. A chance to dedicate time to prayer and create new patterns of prayer that will only deepen our faith.

So wherever we find ourselves, in the midst of worship, by the bedside of someone in a care home or indeed on our own, we recommit ourselves to being people of prayer. To close I want to share words I came across a little while back from theologian John Piper, they speak to me today and feel fitting to share as I draw my reflections to an end.

*Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need. Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy.*

Amen