

## Sunday Thought

16th May 2021 Seventh Sunday of Easter

### Readings

Acts 1: 15 - 17, 21 - 26

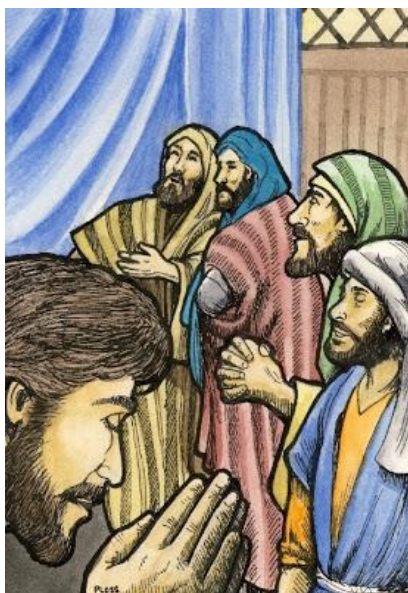
Psalm 1

1 John 5: 9 - 13

John 17: 6 - 19

### Moving On

Recent news has been dominated by elections and by reshuffles in the Labour party cabinet following some disappointing results. The continuing story from the Acts of the Apostles tells of a re-shuffle of leadership among Jesus' first disciples. Matthias is elected as successor to Judas Iscariot. I am pleasantly surprised to read how much of the spirit of their Master is in the disciples'



deliberations prior to voting. There seems to be little blame or bitterness in their words about 'the betrayer'. They speak of him as a member of their band - 'one of us'; as a disciple; as one *chosen to have a part in our work*, and that regardless of their recent memories of him leading a party of guards to Gethsemane, setting Jesus on his road to the Cross, and also knowing that sometimes Judas had had his hand in the communal moneybag. But then, could they really speak of blame when their present leader, Peter, had denied the Lord and most had made themselves scarce when it came to the crucifixion? Now, Jesus was alive. They had seen him. They had been forgiven! This was not the moment for amassing scores of blame. It was in fact a time for moving on to new phases of

ministry and mission.

Hopefully, we are coming close to release from pandemic restrictions, and similarly it is not a time for complaints about the way our lives, our nation, our community and church life have been handled during the past year. It is time to move on to new things in the grace and power of our Lord, Jesus.

Much prayer has been offered in the past months, expressing concern for those who died as a result of the coronavirus, and for their mourning relatives. Prayers for long-term covid19 sufferers, for those whose lives have been shattered by unemployment, poverty, marriage breakdown, mental health problems and many other pre-existing life-situations which the pandemic has highlighted.

Again, the first Jesus followers made prayer – alone and together - the heart of their new lifework as they 'moved on'. I feel sure that uppermost in their minds would be the memory of being with Jesus in the Jerusalem Upper Room the night before he died and the prayer that he made to the Father – for them! It is the Gospel reading for today. The prayer was actually for all Christians – us too as we face a transition time. It is a beautiful prayer devoted to these and all people whom God chooses to work closely with him. He speaks to the Father, *It's time! I'm coming home, albeit through suffering, but I'm having to leave these friends you've given me, here in this world. Father, keep them safe from all harm; make them holy and distinct in their new lifestyle; keep them together- united in love just as we are; keep them joyful; let our joy overflow their hearts.*

The prayer was not just a request. It was a promise. Anyone who has known deep personal sorrow, as these first Christians were to experience it, will know how difficult it can be to remain feeling safe and protected, united and belonging to others and most of all, to be joyful. John, in words from his letter for today, tells how we may have Jesus' prayer answered and be sure of it. There are three assurances or 'proofs' he says – *the water, the blood and the spirit*. That may be explained as our confidence - *'I have been baptised'* - made one with Jesus' people – *'I have been born again to a new spirit-filled life through the Cross'*; and *'I have a deep surety through the Holy Spirit that I belong to Him.'* In the words of an old chorus, I know *'He walks with me; he talks with me and tells me I am his own!'* For the disciples that was confirmed at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to them. Pentecost is just a week away! My prayer is that we and the whole church may emerge from this pandemic as a safe, united, joyful, worldwide band of brothers and sisters.

#### A prayer [from Psalm 1]

*Lord Jesus Christ:  
Our life in you brings us so much happiness;  
You have given us joy.  
We want to maintain that joy, even through  
life's saddest experiences,  
by living your way of compassion and grace;  
by sharing in the family life of your people;  
by listening to what you have to say;  
and by living ever closer to you.....  
Just like a tree beside a stream of water,  
ever open to the flow of your spirit.*

