



**Rev Diana Rattray**  
**Not just heavenly minded**

Acts 1: 6-14

John 17:1-11

Year A Easter 7

21 May 2023

From last Thursday, Ascension Day, until next Sunday, Pentecost we in this part of the Anglican communion are invited to pray for Christian unity. It always seems a tall order when we have not got unity within the Anglican church let alone other Christian churches. Why unity – well I quote for the material provided for the Week Of Prayer for Christian Unity. “How can we live our unity as Christians so as to confront the evils and injustices of our time? How can we engage in dialogue, increase awareness, understanding and insight about one another’s lived experiences?”<sup>[1]</sup> What is core, what is fundamental, for all people is that in the midst of a troubled and complicated world with many living troubled and complicated lives there is a need for the unity to stand against all that is unjust.

This week the tragic fire in the Loafer Lodge hostel in Wellington, the continued bombing of Kyiv, the violence and possible to move back into civil war in the Sudan, the devastating floods in Northern Italy are all events where we hope for change, for peace, and pray for all who have died and all who are now homeless. We are united in the words in the midday prayer in our New Zealand Prayerbook.<sup>[2]</sup>

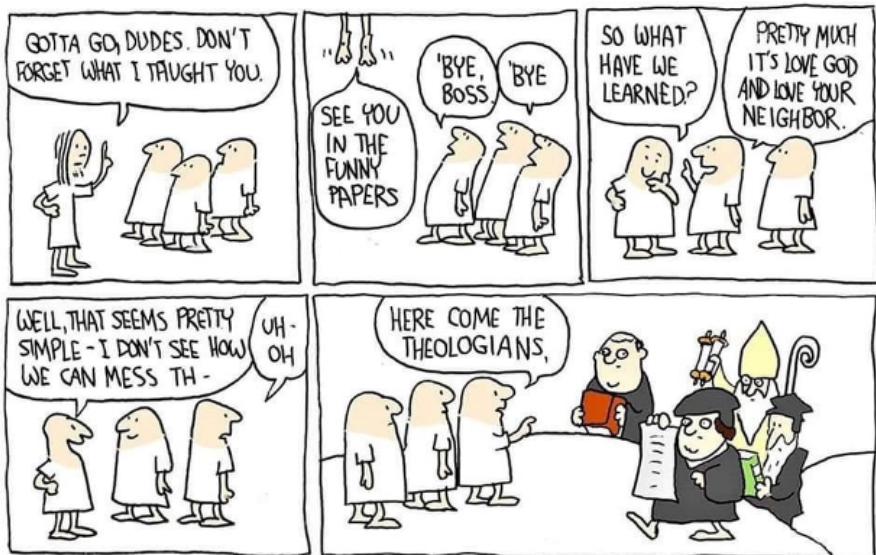
Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth;  
Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust;  
lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

All of us who profess Christian faith are taking our own experiences and theology of the risen and ascended Christ and trying to find ways to make it real in our lives and world. Despite our differences the Wairua, the Spirit of God, fuels the work of justice. If nothing else we can work together for the good of common humanity. Our actions will then speak louder than any words, or difference of theology.

That is exactly what the early church was doing when Christ ascended from his earthly life following resurrection. The early disciples realised they could not stand and stare looking up after the ascended Christ. They could not be so heavenly minded that they neglect doing earthly good. They had to continue the work Jesus had begun and they soon realised that acts of love and justice were the way to keep Christ alive.

Rev George Armstrong posted an Ascension cartoon on Facebook this week. It is a cartoon of Jesus farewelling his disciples with the word "Gotta go dudes." And Jesus' feet just visible as he ascends. The disciples discuss amongst themselves. "What have we learned?" "pretty much it is God's love and love your neighbour.". Another disciple responds, "that seems pretty simple – I don't see how we can mess it up." The last cartoon frame is the disciples looking at figures from church history – "Uh Oh. Here come the theologians." <sup>[3]</sup>



This time between the Ascension and Pentecost is a sort of interlude time. The disciples were motionless, looking up, wondering what to do next. It takes two messengers in white clothing to appear and ask them what in the world they are staring at. Only then does the momentum begin, they make their way down the mountain to Jerusalem and worship and wait and eat and pray, waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. During this time of prayer and waiting they change from students and followers and become apostles, messengers, proclaimers and leaders. In the reading from John's gospel the writer presents a prayer for the church that focusses on unity, on glorifying the whole church and praying for the disciples to be blessed. In praying for Christian unity, in praying for individuals to have a faith in Christ, it does not mean that all Christians have to agree – we know that to be an impossibility. When we pray for change in our world, the first thing that often needs change is us, only then can we be agents of change in the world.

The budget this week, as in every budget from whatever political party, comes with expectations. Somehow that there will be enough revenue so that all the things on the government's and society's wish lists can be given revenue so that they become a reality. And then the economic reality hits home that there is not an endless supply of money. What we have hoped for, we need to work for – be it climate change initiatives or equitable access to health care and housing. We cannot expect there to be a “money fairy” or a “lotto win” to make the world a better place. I believe our faith journeys, our passion for social justice, changes the way we view things. Rather than seeking retribution - perhaps we can contemplate divine forgiveness. When we pray for, and work for unity, we can become more aware of the areas of our lives and in our world which are most in need of divine transformation. The hope of the writer of John's gospel is that we all recognise that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. The unity we are called to is one that seeks real understanding and strength as we reach out to a hurting and hope-less world. We have no idea of what the remainder of 2023 will bring, let alone 2024. There will be accomplishments and setbacks, victories and defeats, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies on a personal, communal, national, and global scale. Our response in faith is to live out good news, so that we can comfort others, work for peace, live with less fear and more generosity, preparing us to look out for the rights of others, preparing us to strive for a more just community and world. Here at St Matthews we glorify the Risen and Ascended Christ with music, songs, words and actions of praise as well as reaching out in acts of service. Let us use this interlude between Ascension and Pentecost as a time to refocus on the ways we respond to the world around us. **Amen.**

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[1] <http://www.catholic.org.nz/resources/wopcu2023/>

[2] <https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/147.html>, p164 (adapted)

[3] Cartoon by Man Overboard, Facebook – Episcopal Church memes