

**Easter V, 2024 (28<sup>th</sup> April)**

**John 15:1-8**

***'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'***

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There's a problem, isn't there. It's just not true. Not only when you're asking for trivial or stupid or selfish things: 'O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz'. No, even when you're asking for good things: for healing, for peace, for justice. You can ask for these things – ask often, ask hard for these *good* things, and still not get them.

How do we address this?

Firstly, obviously, context. Jesus *doesn't* just say that everything you wish will be done for you. There's a condition: If you abide in me, and my words abide in you. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you.

And the context of *that* is what he says about Him being the true vine, and our being branches that grow from him. Now in some ways this is a difficult idea, but it is the absolutely basic truth that we hear again and again in Christianity. Jesus Christ is not just a teacher or a good example. Not just somebody we admire from afar, and try to copy. No. Jesus Christ is someone *who shares his life with us*. He puts Himself inside us. He makes it so that the deepest centre of us, is Him. As St. Paul says, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

If you are a Christian, you've had a new life put inside you. That is the meaning of the eucharist, of communion. Jesus Christ is feeding you with Himself. He's putting Himself inside of you, to make you more like him. That he may dwell in us, and we in Him. He is the vine, we are the branches. His sap, his energy, his life, He Himself, rises up in us, and lives through us. He is, as the hymn says, the great heart of our own hearts.

And so when he says, If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you, he means: if you're living my life, thinking my thoughts, desiring my desires, if your whole being is so immersed in mine, so baptised, that you have become entirely suffused with my character, if this has all happened so deeply that your prayer has become my prayer, then, says Jesus, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

Now, that is obviously a very different proposition than Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz.

However... there's still a problem. What if we are living that life, we are deeply baptised into Jesus, we're asking for what we *know* he wants – say, the strength to overcome an addiction, or the grace to forgive a terrible wrong – and *still* it doesn't come. *Still* there's no answer. And we know that happens. Even for the best Christians at their very best, it isn't always true that whatever you wish for will be done for you.

How do we address that?

All I can do this morning is sketch out the beginnings of an answer.

But firstly, and obviously, you're not God. You might be very, very confident that you know what the best thing is in any situation, what God *should* do, but your perspective is very limited. What you think is best might turn out to be utter disaster. It might well be for your own good that your prayer doesn't work.

Secondly, Jesus said you would be given what you wished for. He didn't say when, or how. So take, for instance, praying for freedom from an addiction. Surely, God wants people freed. Absolutely. And we certainly *want* to be freed – zapped free, instantly and forever. And so that's what we pray for. But maybe, for reasons that not being God we don't understand, we need to wait. Maybe there are lessons to be learned, wisdom to be won, important stuff that only can happen if we are *not* zapped. Only if, for now, we are *not* set free and we go on through hardship and failure. St. Paul says something very similar about himself, he talks of a thorn in the flesh which he had begged God to remove, but which God left in place. To teach me, said Paul, not to be too confident, too arrogant.

And thirdly, from Paul, to Jesus. Jesus himself meets a 'no'. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'Father, please, remove this cup from me' – remove the Cross, the suffering, the pain, the death. Jesus doesn't want to do it. He could retire and live a quiet, good, happy life. And to that desperate, Jesus prayer... his Father says, no. What Jesus wants does not happen.

I wonder what Jesus would say then if somebody quoted back to him: 'ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you'?

And I think he might say this.

What I wanted in Gethsemane, what I deep down wanted that night, and all my life, was to do the will of my Father, to save his world. That was my everything. But to accept that it actually meant *dying*, meant the Cross – that was overwhelming, crushing. I looked for a way out, for a different plan. I could not see how *this* was going to work. And yet, as I prayed to be free, still it came... that deep down heart conviction, that word from the Father: there is no other way. That this was it, that I had to go on.

Ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. What I wished, even more deeply, more strongly, than for my own life, was to do God's work. To save the world. And that meant stripping away so much else of what I thought I wanted, so much else that turned out to be not the essential thing. My happiness, my life, *me*: not essential. The essential thing was to do my Father's will. In the final analysis, that's what I wished. That's what I truly wanted. The power to be what I was meant be. And that was done for me.

So, yes, my disciples. Ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. But it's not about swimming pools and Mercedes Benz. It's not even about better things: healings, freedom, peace. Those good things will come. God will give them, in His own time, in His own way. He's our Father, and you can trust him. His kingdom will come. But for now, if you abide in me, and my words in you, leave all that in his hands, in his time. Make your prayer my prayer: just to be big enough, deep enough, loving enough to do his will. To be the person He needs you to be. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. Everything else will come in God's time, God's way.

And for now, that is enough. So to my Father and yours, be all glory and power now and forever. Amen.