

Jesus Prayed (3) “That I will be in them...”

Like most people my parents had a box full of mementoes from the past. They have been passed on to us kids at various stages but more recently when they moved into a retirement village was the latest clean out.

Some old photos of me

Read tribute to Frances Brown

FRANCES BROWN 26 October 1917 – 8 January 2015

Frances Brown and sister Daphne with their mother came to live in Otumoetai in 1951. Their home was no. 6 Marine Parade, now known as Harbour Drive. The Causeway was yet to be built and to get to town was a longer journey than it is today. But Otumoetai was a rapidly growing suburb and the Brown family noticed the need for a Sunday School.

After visiting homes in the area they started a Sunday School in their garage at Marine Parade in 1953. This Sunday School grew and grew, reaching an attendance of up to 60 children. They used the garage but in wet weather or when needed they overflowed into the house – bedrooms, lounge and washhouse.

I (Judy Tallon) arrived at age 7 when our family moved to Otumoetai from Morrinsville and we went to the Sunday School run by Frances and family. I will never forget those Sunday mornings in the garage.

Tauranga Central Baptist Church then built a small hall on a section donated by the Rushton family on the corner of Grange Road and Rushton Avenue and in 1955, after the last Sunday school in their garage on November 13th they moved to the hall where a new Baptist Fellowship was meeting on Sunday mornings for a service and Sunday School.

Frances and family were among the 21 original members when the new Otumoetai Baptist Church was constituted in 1958. So you could say that Otumoetai Baptist began in the Browns' garage and from that beginning a further legacy in daughter churches in Tauranga – Bethlehem, Matua and Greerton.

Frances continued her involvement in teaching Sunday School, faithful attendance at weekly prayer meetings, women's outreach fellowship, BMWU (the missionary support and prayer group) and a Maori Sunday School at the Wairoa Pa in the 1960's. Friendship Club for the over 60's began in 1974 and was faithfully attended and helped by Frances.

When she stopped driving she walked to church and was always there until about 3 or 4 years ago when increasing old age kept her home with Daphne and then 18 months ago moving to Elizabeth Knox home in Auckland.

Most of the present attenders of OBC wouldn't know her but those of us who do remember her with love and great respect as a significant, faithful, always cheerful, helpful follower of Jesus and long-time member of OBC.

Judy Tallon
10th January 2015

Show book that Frances kept on OBC.

It is always interesting what photos and mementos people keep. It struck me that years and years and years of events had been and gone but the only things that my Mum had saved was stuff about family, the one of the key things that Frances had saved was about us, the church that she helped to birth.

I guess it's only human. In my life time we have walked on the moon, Nelson Mandela walked to freedom, wars had been won and lost, presidents shot, human hearts transplanted, the Berlin Wall collapsed and the World Wide Web created. But the news items carefully stored and kept were those that were about "us".

Over recent weeks we have been looking at Jesus prayer recorded in John 17. As we go through Jesus' prayer we pick up certain things pick up. In our first week we find he prayed for himself in v1-5 - fair enough. In the second week he prayed for his disciples (v6-19). But now in the final section, v20-26, he prays for "us" – the people who would come to faith without having directly seen Jesus but via having heard the testimony of the disciples in no matter how long a line. So today we focus on what Jesus prayed for "us"...

John 17:20-26 New Living Translation (NLT)

²⁰"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

²²"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can

see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

²⁵“O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.”

AN ASSUMPTION (V20)

This week I researched the state of Christianity in the world. According to wikipedia, the number of people who claim some kind of allegiance to Jesus (however loose) is 2.4 billion. They make up 33% of the world’s population and despite what atheists would want us to believe it has slowly been increasing, albeit slowly.

Things have come a long way since that frightening night in the upper room when after speaking to the disciples Jesus prays to the Father. At the time His prayer would have seemed ambitious.

In verse 20 Jesus makes an assumption as he talks about those who will come to faith because of the disciples’ testimony. But just a few hours later, the leader of the group, the ever impulsive Peter, finds himself strangely silent when asked if he knew Jesus. Three times he denies that he has even the most distant knowledge of who Jesus is. Some testimony!

Not many hours after that Jesus completes his suffering on the Cross with the cry, “It is finished”. We’ve got used to interpreting that as a triumphant cry meaning, “I have been obedient and accomplished all the Father intended through my suffering on the Cross”, but if you had been there at the time you would have been excused for thinking that Jesus meant “It’s finished. It’s all over. I’m about to die and everything is collapsing around me.” Only the most astonishing eyes of faith can see a future where the message of Jesus would radically change the course of history and capture the hearts of a third of the world’s population.

It’s worth reflecting on the assumptions of Jesus expressed in v 20...

- His disciples will bear testimony to him.
- There will be a harvest. People who have never seen Jesus will believe in Him though the testimony of others.

Spreading the message of Jesus has always been dependent on those who know Him speaking of Him. For the early disciples, there were real risks to that

speaking. It cost many their lives. But in spite of that hefty cost, Jesus is confident that those who follow Him will speak up for Him.

I am told if you study psychology you would probably come across the tragic case of Kitty Genevieve back in 1964 (or something similar). Stabbed and strangled to death in New York, when her murder was investigated it turned out that literally hundreds of people had heard her screams and calls for help. They had lasted for over half an hour. But no one came to her help, no one even dialed 911. The conclusion reached was not that the people in that city were particularly heartless, but that the crowded nature of the city led to what was called “bystander apathy”. With so many other people around who could help, everyone assumed someone else would. But no one else did...

One of the risks to the church in our day is that we will assume that someone else will pass on the message of Jesus. This is something that we as church leaders wrestle with regularly. We talk about the impact we should be having as a church community. After all, there are about 350 people who call Otumoetai Baptist their spiritual home. Cumulatively we are probably in touch with several thousand different people each week. So as we leave worship each Sunday we go encouraged to touch the lives of thousands of others with the message of Jesus. So why not far more impact?

Perhaps because we all assume someone else will do it...

The tragedy of this is that our timidity and silence often means that the task of evangelism is left to those least suited for it.

I previous senior pastor of mine tells a story of a close encounter with an evangelist in a lift. This incredibly large woman simply screamed at him all the way down 20 something floors in what must have been the world’s slowest lift. She told him he was going to hell unless he repented, then gave a detailed weather report of conditions there, then told him about how dreadful his sins were and so it went on. He never did manage to tell her that he was already a Christian and that his mansion in heaven was assured – though hopefully a long way from hers!

The tragedy of evangelism is that when we speak of it images like that spring to mind. And so we back away. We don’t realize that we’re creating what sociologists would call a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. It’s because sensitive and gentle people shy away from evangelism that it is left to the insensitive. And the more it is left to the insensitive, the more those who would do it best, keep silent.

I want to make a comment. If you find the thought of speaking to someone about Jesus a little frightening and something you’d find hard to do, you’re probably

the ideal person to do it. Of all people, you will do it in a way that is sensitive to both what the other person is feeling and what the Spirit is doing in their life.

Jesus' assumption in this prayer is that those who follow Him will bear testimony to Him. It goes even further. It will bear fruit. In the end we don't tell people about Jesus to ease our conscience. We aren't trying to earn brownie points to entitle us to better seats in heaven. We're looking for a harvest. Jesus was confident there would be one. Your presence here today – 2000 years after that assumption was made, proves that Jesus was correct. In every era, where those who follow Jesus have been willing to speak and live for Him, there has been a harvest. If the 350 of us are willing to speak to the 1000's we're in touch with every week, there will be a significant harvest. It's that simple!

A REQUEST (V21)

Having by faith envisioned a future group of believers, Jesus prays that they will be one.

The 12 disciples were all Jewish and all male. Several were friends before they became the disciples of Jesus; others were related. It's hard to imagine a group that was more likely to be able to get along with each other, especially as they had an expert teacher and guide in Jesus to help smooth over any fractious moments.

For all that, there had been many tense moments! Just a few hours before this prayer, the disciples had all held back from the task of washing each other's feet. In the end, Jesus did it (John 13). Arguments as to who was the most important disciple were not uncommon (Matt 18:1), and even after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter expresses a mild protest that John will be exempt from a martyr's death (John 21:20-23). Jesus knew that keeping the early disciples united and working harmoniously was a major challenge.

If it was hard for them, how much harder for those who were to come later. Paul sums up the nature of the new community that resulted from the disciples witness when he writes in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. He affirms that in Christ, these old divides no longer mattered. That's an easy claim to make, living it out is often somewhat trickier!

For the ancient world, nationality was everything (and let's face it, it still is! eg. How's your blood pressure in the midst of an All Black's Rugby game? It's not really just a game is it? It's about national pride and all those kinds of things!) Jewish men prayed every day, "I thank you Lord that I was not born an ignorant man, a gentile or a woman". The changes this group faced were staggering. They

had to welcome in Gentiles with all their strange ways and customs. Women had a role they had never had in Judaism. Slaves were welcome, as were the powerful and wealthy. The possibility of conflict was always real. And no... the early church didn't always get it right. There were many tense moments. You only have to read Paul's letters to realize how many problems they faced.

And it's no easier for us today. Because people have been won to faith in Christ from every tribe and tongue, from every age group, from every conceivable background, it is always possible for misunderstanding to result. Jesus' prayer for his disciples is pertinent, "That they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father" (v21).

I remember as a teenager an elderly bloke in the church who would often argue strongly against a proposed change at a church members meeting. To me it was all pretty tense and he seemed most unhappy but then I learnt that this same guy was one of the churches biggest supporters both in finance and what he did around the church, even in the areas that he didn't agree with. To my teenage eyes I initially saw a grumpy old man who didn't like change, but what he was, was a godly man, passionate for the church, answering Jesus' prayer "That they may be one..."

Unity does not mean uniformity. To the contrary, our unity only really strikes us as being 'God given' when we realize how many natural differences there are among us. One of the things I specially love about OBC is our age diversity. Look around you... so many generations, so many different life stories, it's challenging but it's wonderful. My hope and prayer is that we will increase in ethnic diversity and therefore will again multiply the life stories and the challenges. Jesus has prayed for us that we would be one. You play your part in answering his prayer!

A VISION (V26)

Jesus finishes his prayer with a pledge and a vision. He will keep on revealing God to generations of disciples who were yet to come to faith. Now the love of God and His presence would fill them (v26).

The most remarkable thing about being a Christian is that Christ lives in us. It's the Jesus difference! We mustn't forget it.

A teenager arrives home from school drenched. He looks like a walking waterfall, with water pouring out everywhere. "What a storm," he mutters. "So why didn't you use your umbrella and raincoat?" Mum asks. He paused for a while. "Good question. You've got me there!"

All the resources available to meet the storm were there. They were simply unutilized.

Jesus' closing pledge for both the present and future disciples was simply this:
"I will be living in you!"

And if He lives in us, it's possible to speak a word for him, and to live in unity, and to show His love to others.

You have been prayed for. And the one who prayed for you, lives in you...