

“KEEP THEM SAFE”

John 17:1-11 [MW20-20]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton, Sunday 24 May 2020

Keep safe ... Be safe ...

- words I have used many times over the past eight weeks in phone conversations, emails, writing
- keep safe ... be safe ...
when you look at the news, read reports of what's happening in other countries there's a lot to keep safe from
- much to be out of the way of

In the Gospel reading we heard today Jesus is praying for his disciples

- his closest friends
really, after all they have been through together, they are like his family
- Jesus prays to his heavenly Father to keep them safe and there is a lot for the disciples to be kept safe from
- Jesus, their leader, is about to be arrested, swiftly tried, cruelly executed a fate which could so very easily extend to his followers
- no wonder they ran away
no wonder they were afraid
no wonder they went into hiding

Keep safe? Yeah right!

- even after Jesus was raised from the dead
his disciples still hid in fear, behind locked doors
- I don't know that it has ever been “safe” to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus and yet Jesus' prayer “keep them safe” means something ...

What does it mean to be “safe” in Aotearoa New Zealand on Sunday May 24, 2020?

- we are pretty much free from attack by a hostile enemy
pretty much safe from a food shortage
pretty much safe from having nowhere to live
pretty much safe to admit to following Jesus
- life may not be always simple and straight forward
but we are pretty much safe to do and live the best we can

Yet all of us have realised pretty sharply that we are not automatically safe

- a nasty little virus called Covid-19 has turned the whole world upside down and pretty much changed things forever
- even here in Aotearoa New Zealand

Keep safe ... be safe ...

- we have acted in sensible and responsible ways
with a lock down, limited contact, alert levels and regulations
in order to prevent horrible things happening
- we have looked after our neighbours and ourselves
we have helped each other keep safe from the ravages of a destructive virus
- but it is still out there so we have to be vigilant, and not relax
we cannot afford to take things for granted ... never again
- the effects will be with us for a long, long time
socially, economically, psychologically
nothing it seems can keep us safe from that

Keep safe ... be safe ...

- I said to other people, knowing there was more to it something else I did whether they knew it or not:
I prayed
- Jesus prayed: "keep them safe"
there is something more here
- there is something about "being safe" that has nothing to do with what we do and everything to do with what God does

"Keep them safe"

- I have been reflecting on this for the past few days
here is a thought which I offer you ... it may help you in regard to being "safe"
please take it further if you wish

Do you remember those games you might have played as a child

- maybe even you still do
where someone is "in" and they have to catch or tag the others
- but if you get to a designated spot, "den", "home"
without being caught or tagged
what are you?
- you are "safe"

You cannot be tagged

- you cannot be caught or dragged back into the "playing field"
unless you wish to go
until you are ready to go

"Safe" is a place of respite, refuge, rest, refreshment, restoration

- a place of peace and calm where you can catch your breath

Maybe that was what Jesus was praying about for his disciples

- they were not going to suddenly be removed from turmoil and trouble
heck, sometimes they were actually going to cause it!
- however in the midst of all that, they would be "safe"
they would be able to carry on
- they would have an awareness of God with them
they would have the presence of the Holy Spirit
they would be conscious of walking in the footsteps of Jesus
- and they would be "safe"

If you have someone or ones with you, you may like to discuss

- if you are on your own I invite you to reflect
on what it is to be safe ...

How do you know you are safe?

What are the signs, indications?

What does it look like?

What does it feel like? [hold up sheet with questions]

Please take a couple of moments to discuss/reflect while music plays quietly

Keep safe ... be safe ...

- for me this includes being able to sleep comfortably at night
not being on my own
warmth

It really seems to me that being safe is not so much about what we do

- and has everything to do with what God does
with what God offers us through Jesus
- and because we are “safe”, we are able to reach out to others
able to help others, able to give support
able to encourage and share hope

Keep safe ... be safe ...

- I invite you now to hear these words from John 17:6-11
as Jesus praying specifically for you
- where there is a space I will hold up this sign “Your Name”
and invite you to say your name
because Jesus is praying for you ...

Father, You have given me [name], and I have shown [name] what you are like.

You gave [name] to me, and they have obeyed you.

[name] knows that you gave me everything I have.

I told [name] what you told me, and they accepted it.

They know that I came from you, and they believe that you are the one who sent me.

I am praying for [name], but not for those who belong to this world.

[name] belongs to you, and I am praying for them.

All that I have is yours, and all that you have is mine, and they will bring glory to me.

Holy Father, I am no longer in the world.

I am coming to you, but [name] is still in the world.

So keep [name] safe by the power of the name that you have given me.

Amen.

I invite you to reflect on all this as Jules Riding sings “Safe in the Arms of Jesus”

- the words are on the hymn sheet so you can read them or sing along as you wish

[hold up pictures – one for each verse, repeat at end]