

This is one of a series of my reflections based on the banners that are hanging in St Peters and St Paul's Church, Aylesford. There are 8 banners:

GOD Listens	GOD Enables
GOD Loves	GOD Provides
GOD Creates	GOD Encourages
GOD Cares	GOD Lives

Other banner reflections will follow but in the meantime a printed version of the series of reflections is available in the church.



## GOD ENABLES

**A**s Jesus moved from the inner room where he had spent time with his closest friends, sharing a meal together and now to face the greatest test of all, he stopped to pray. Reading Chapter 17 of John's Gospel we can imagine the eyes of his friends fixed on Jesus, silently watching and waiting; imagine their faces as they realise they are witnessing not just a man of prayer but a Father and Son intimately bound together in love.

To read the whole of Chapter 17 of John's Gospel is to stand listening with those friends of Jesus in wonder. Gradually Jesus' prayer widens its range. First he prays for himself as he faces the Cross. Then he prays for his disciples and for God's power over them. Lastly Jesus takes a whole sweep

into the distant future as he prays for all those who, in distant lands and far off ages, will enter the Christian faith.

By reading this passage we can see the true harmony that existed between Jesus and his Father. Through this harmony Jesus is praying for us all to share in his kingdom of love, in his eternal life. We can get to know God but the word 'know', here, means something more than a simple acceptance of a fact. It was William Temple, in his work on John's Gospel, who said that the word for know here is not that which stands for a grasp of the truth but a personal acquaintance. Our human relationships, for example, develop in exciting ways as new discoveries by each person in the character of another.

Jesus was praying that his disciples would be kept safe, entrusting their life to God his Father. And for us, some two thousand years later, might become personally acquainted with God. What assurance it must have given those friends that they had been considered important enough and loved enough, for Jesus to share his concern for them, with his Father. But Jesus doesn't finish there. He prays for the countless Christians who have followed on. He shows faith and certainty for the future. At the very moment when his the majority of his followers had deserted him and the shadow of the Cross loomed large, his confidence was unshaken and he prayed to his Father about the future, our future. He prayed for all who would come to believe in him. He was confident in his disciples. He prays to God to keep them safe, for their mission ahead. He looked on them with confidence to build his Church. This was a very precious prayer for Jesus' disciples.

It is a precious prayer for us too. We will never know, this side of heaven, how many people make up the links in the chain of our coming to know Jesus. But we are all one of those people Jesus was praying about, as retold in the John Chapter 17. And was Jesus right to have confidence in us? When the world around us sees Jesus' quality of love in our lives then he certainly is. Paul writes that the love of Christ leaves us no choice at the point when we believe that one man died for all. When anyone is united in Christ there is a new world; the old order has gone and a new order has already begun. We can take part in that new ordering through our committed witness of the love of Christ. And our witness should not start with us saying: "Right now I will try and do my bit to love and help my neighbour!" We have it wrong then! As Jesus shows the nature and the motive of our Christian witness and service is not to start by first deciding what we will do for God. God has already started. He sent Christ on his mission. Jesus died for us. Jesus lived at one with God so that we might come to know God. We witness for Christ therefore because he first served us and died for us. In Jesus' prayer he is praying that because of this service we might become one with him.

And God enables us to do all this! Jesus prays on: "I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may always see the glory you have given me." The joy we have now is only a faint foretaste of the joy that is to come. It is Christ's promise that if we share his glory and his sufferings on

earth we shall share his glory when life on this earth is ended. What greater promise could we ever have than this?

From this prayer Jesus walks down the valley and into the Garden of Gethsemane. His experience in the peaceful and prayerful garden will soon be cruelly shattered.