

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

1 June 2025

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

Sermon by the Revd Canon Matthew Vernon

Two Fridays ago I led a funeral at the crematorium: the funeral for Robert Everitt. The crematorium chapel was very full, standing room only and overflowing through the door. Robert was a past Mayor, a Town Councillor and a County Councillor. He was known to many people - one of life's super-connectors. A couple of times during the funeral I noticed different people and thought "oh he knew them too". In the chapel, there was a deep sense of togetherness and unity, of connection through Robert.

"that they may be one, as we are one" ¹

On Bank Holiday Monday this week there was a wedding here in the Cathedral. Our own Lay Minister Caitlin Brinkley married Matt Fitzjohn. Caitlin's Mum Catriona officiated - brimming with the emotion of the occasion. It was wonderful, as weddings here are. Families and friends one in joy and celebration and love, in the uplifting beauty of this place. There was a deep sense of togetherness and unity.

"that they may be one, as we are one"

When you have you felt one with other people? When you do you feel one with other people? There are many possibilities: funerals, weddings, gatherings of friends, shared experiences, music events, sport. The football season has just ended and some fans are enjoying a sense of unity and connection: Crystal Palace winning the FA Cup, Arsenal women winning the Champion's League, Liverpool winning the Premier League, Tottenham saving their season by winning the Europa League, Newcastle and Chelsea in on the act too. Harry Kane winning his first league title with Bayern Munich. You can tell I like the footie. But there is a difference, I think, between the sense of unity in sport and the sense of unity at a funeral or wedding. The story of Jesus at a football match illustrates this difference. A match between the Catholic Crusaders and the Protestant Pilgrims. The Catholic Crusaders scored first. Jesus jumped up and cheered wildly. Then the Protestant Pilgrims scored. Jesus jumped up and cheered wildly. The man sitting behind Jesus tapped him on the shoulder. "Oi mate. Who are you supporting?" "Me?" replied Jesus, clearly having a great time, "I'm not supporting either side. I'm just enjoying the game." The man behind turned to his neighbour and said, "you hear that? He must be an atheist".

Sport is us against them. Being one at Robert's funeral and Caitlin's wedding are examples of unity in compassion and love, the unity Jesus speaks of. Compassion and love that are uniting and outward looking.

"that they may be one, as we are one"

¹ John 17.22b

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Who are you one with? I imagine family, a partner, close friends come quickly to mind for many of us. “Those we love and know well, in-dwell us, and we them.”² David Ford says this about this morning’s Gospel, about the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son: “There is a family home where we are fully welcome, a place to live in intimacy with the Father and the Son, somewhere to abide permanently in mutual honouring, belonging, and love.”³

“that they may be one, as we are one”

We are invited to see that our unity with other people exists within the unity of the Father and Son. Our unity is an experience of God’s mutual indwelling. Notice I am not saying our unity is like the unity of Father and Son. According to Jesus in the Gospel of John, our being one, is the unity of Father and Son. John wants us to see beyond the sense of separation from God that plagues us and deludes us.

It is an awareness available to us all the time. An awareness, rather than a feeling, because my fickle positive feelings are not a reliable indicator of God’s presence. Awareness is available whether we are feeling upbeat or fed up. Throughout the Bible, when a character encounters God, the person responds “Here I am”. God calls to Moses from the burning bush and Moses replies “Here I am”. God calls to Samuel when he is a boy in the temple and Samuel replies “Here I am”. When the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary. God is calling to us all the time, each moment. And each moment we can respond “Here I am”. At any point in the day, wherever you are, funeral, wedding, football match, you can say “Here I am”. And in an instant you are aware of God again. Taking a breath at the same time can help. Your mind has wandered or your feelings have exploded. When you notice, you can smile, notice your breath and say “Here I am”. Try it now.

And for us, “I am” has double meaning: I am - and the “I am” of Jesus. “Jesus in us is our core identity, ... intimately loving and loved, breathing his spirit into us, uniting us in the community, sending us as he was sent”.⁴

“In Illo uno unum”⁵ In the One, we are one.

² David Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* p. 349

³ *Ibid* p. 349

⁴ *Ibid* p.353

⁵ Pope Leo XIV’s chosen motto, reflecting this Augustinian tradition.