

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Easter 5

Collect:

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate to life everlasting, grant that as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Acts 7:55-60 Psalm 35: 1-5. 15-16 1Peter 2:2-10 **John 14:1-14**

In writing and reading may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

This bank holiday weekend we will be hearing much about routes through times of difficulty and challenge. On Friday evening many of us will have heard the Queen echo her father as she reflected on the attitudes that were the route out of war seventy five years ago:

“At the start, the outlook seemed bleak, the end distant, the outcome uncertain. But we kept faith that the cause was right - and this belief, as my father noted in his broadcast, carried us through.

Never give up, never despair - that was the message of VE Day.”

Put positively those words champion the virtues of faith and hope.

And she ended her speech by highlighting the qualities that are at work in our communities in keeping us going through the anxiety and restrictions of our times:

“our streets are not empty; they are filled with the love and the care that we have for each other.”

So, it seems to me, the Queen with the wisdom of her years and experience encourages us to seek faith, hope and love as the qualities that guide us through great trials, in other words, the great Christian virtues that St Paul calls his community to pray for in his letter to the Corinthians.

And this evening we have been promised an announcement from the Prime Minister that is described as a “roadmap” of the practical action the government proposes to bring us out of the current lockdown safely. We anticipate an outline of the timing of a series of changes to the rules and guide lines that we follow to keep each other safe and prevent Covid 19 spreading and overwhelming our NHS capacity to treat people.

Qualities of character or virtue or rules to follow: two ways of looking at what shows us the way to go, to live our lives, to navigate through life’s trials.

And then we come to today’s gospel, with its conversation between Thomas and Jesus as its heart. Thomas who (as later in the upper room) plays that useful role as the person who puts into words the question asking for clarification which we all need but most of us are embarrassed to admit to needing. This conversation goes beyond the scope of how did we get through the war, or how do we cope with these challenging days, to the bigger question (which maybe the answer to the other two) of what guides us throughout our days to the experience of eternal life with God.

Jesus tells his friends that he is going to a place prepared for them, and he come to them and will bring them to that place, but he also assures them that they know the way.

Thomas is blunt: 'we don't even know where you are going, so how can we know the way'. For Thomas it seems a straightforward principle that you plan your journey according to the destination.

Jesus replies with a remarkable and mysterious statement:

I am the way, the truth and the life.

He is not offering them as set of qualities to live by, or a set of rules to follow to direct them to the destination, he is giving them himself.

And he is giving them himself not only as the way but as the destination too: he is both the way and the life.

If that is not mysterious enough he continues that if they know him they know the Father, if they have seen him they have seen the Father.

Jesus shows us God, just as God is. To have seen Jesus is to have seen God.

This reminds us why, as Christians, Jesus is the centre of our faith: the 'cornerstone' as the letter to Peter puts it, which is the reference point for the life we build together.

We worship Jesus because he is God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the way for us to God in that as a human being he lived in complete response to the love in which God creates us, took upon himself all that is in opposition to God's will for us, suffering and death, and carried us to new life in resurrection. Risen, he is our humanity living in the eternal love of God – the life to which he carries us all, as members of his body.

That's a paragraph of words that is quite breath taking I think. If we were to spend the rest of the week....month....however

long... asking God to show us its truth, it could be the guiding response which shows us the way.

Because, having Jesus, a person, as the centre of our faith, takes us beyond the usual ways we think about what guides us on our route through life, beyond qualities and rules, to a relationship. The beliefs and practices that we recognise in our Christian traditions are there only to create the space for and to nurture that relationship.

Our sacraments are ways in which we use physical things, by God's gift, to allow the pattern of Jesus' life and death to become real in us. In baptism, by water we are initiated into the pattern of his life, death and resurrection once and for all and become members of his body. In participation in the Eucharist we renew that sharing in Jesus life, death and resurrection through receiving sacramentally his body and blood. While we cannot share the Eucharist physically, it may be a good time to focus on the gift of baptism – how its ongoing power within you is a way to the place Jesus prepares for you, a way of sharing in his life and a way of knowing the deep unity we share as members of his body even as we are separate.

Our prayer and worship (in words or song or silence) is a means of being drawn into deeper relationship with Jesus, deeper friendship, through which he brings us more deeply into the love of his Father. Resting in prayer at this time allows God the space to draw us into the life and love of the Godhead and shape us in the image of Christ to reveal such love in the world in our own way, the particular way God has given each of us to be his witnesses.

Through the Bible, and the gospels especially, we can come to know Jesus through the stories preserved of his life and teaching. What qualities do we find attractive in him that we

can pray for and encourage in ourselves. One of the meanings of Jesus talking about himself as “the way” is that he calls us to follow him, to learn of God from him as a disciple and to learn to be more like him and to act in the world in the way that he acted.

And in his teaching he does give us a few commandments, a few rules – primarily the command to love. If our lives have been patterned on his, if we come to know him ever more closely as our friend, if we emulate him in our action then following his commandments won't feel like keeping rules – but like the truthful way of living that is “life” in all its fullness.

Through reflections on many of the passages since Easter we have been moving more deeply into recognising Jesus' voice in our lives and praying with him; and noticing the patterns of God in our own lives and God's will to draw us towards eternal life through all that we experience now.

In today's Gospel we find a centre for all this in Jesus' invitation to rest in him as the one who is the way, the truth and the life, the one who is our way and our destination.

At the end of the Gospel passage he encourages his friends that

If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

It is my prayer for us all

that Jesus' faith, hope and love are the guiding qualities that carry us through this current time,

that he is our definitive road map for days to come,

that strengthened by the traditions of our faith we may walk his way, hold fast to his truth and discover the fullness of the life Jesus holds us in eternally. Amen

Ever present God, Be our comfort in times of uncertainty, our stability in times of change, our peace through anxiety, our companion in all things. Amen

Gospel readings for this week:

Monday 11th John 14:21-26

Tuesday 12th John 14:27-end

Wednesday 13th John 15:1-8

Thursday 14th (St Mathias) John 15: 9-17

Also Pope Francis has invited people of all faiths and all of goodwill to mark this day as one of prayer, fasting and acts of loving kindness for the overcoming of the global pandemic.

Friday 15th John 15:12-17

Saturday 16th John 15:18-21