

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 6th Sunday of Easter – 17th May 2020

Canon David Pickering.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.

All four gospels record that Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples before his death. However, as is often the case, St. John has his own distinct version. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels focus on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, in common with rest of his gospel style, St. John records what has come to be known as Jesus' "farewell discourse". This begins in chapter 13 and concludes with Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in chapter 17.

Last Sunday we read the first fourteen verses of chapter 14 where Jesus gives a general assurance about his and his disciples' relationship with the Father. John's reflection last week reminded us that this relationship with the Father is open to everyone. Today's good news comes in the following seven verses, and takes this idea one stage further: Jesus promises in detail the coming of the Holy Spirit, which the evangelist calls the Advocate and Spirit of Truth. He will not be abandoning his disciples, nor us. Verse 18 tells us, "*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.*" The Holy Spirit will be Jesus' continuing presence with his disciples, and with us.

Now I have to be careful here, because I don't want to spoil John's thunder for Pentecost, in two weeks' time, when he will no doubt give us a full exposition on the Holy Spirit. But, if we move on to verse 19, we find that Jesus also seems to be referring to his resurrection, "*In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.*"

When we think of the coming of the Holy Spirit, we tend to follow the Lucan chronology as found in Acts chapter 2. But John gives us quite a different picture. For him the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the resurrection experience. From verse 19 onwards we read, “*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this he showed them his hands and his side. he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*”

For John the coming of the Holy Spirit is part of the Easter Day event. Not something that occurred fifty days later.

It’s interesting to compare the words of the Ordination Service as seen in the modern Common Worship with those used previously:

“Here the bishop and priests lay their hands on the head of each ordinand, and the bishop says:

*Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant N
for the office and work of a priest in your Church.”*

But when I was ordained, the Bishop used words from the Book of Common Prayer Ordination Service: “*Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. . . .”* so reflecting John 20, verses 22 & 23.

For St John, the resurrection and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. The resurrection life of Jesus is the life of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus was not just a coming back to life again. When Jesus raised Lazarus and others from the dead it was a resuscitation to a physical life from which they would eventually die. But for Jesus this was very different: he was resurrected, something far greater and more wonderful than mere physical reanimation. In his risen form Jesus could appear and disappear, he could arrive through closed doors. None of these would be possible for a simply resuscitated physical body.

The resurrection life is a life lived in, with, and through the Holy Spirit. And it is a life that can be lived now. We may only know and experience the fullness of

that life when we have completed this physical existence, but that doesn't mean it cannot be the mainstay, guide and inspiration of our present journey.

Here, I make an apology to all those who over the years have heard me insisting on my hobby horse, the fruits of the Spirit. As Galatians 5.22 shows us, it is when we live the fruits of the Spirit that we become a living part of the resurrection life. St. Paul writes that the fruits of the Spirit are:

Love Joy

Peace Patience

Kindness Generosity (or, in some translations, Goodness)

Faithfulness Gentleness

Self-control

We shouldn't just reel these off as some kind of memorised list or formula.

They need to be reflected upon, slowly and thoughtfully. Here lies our resurrection life, here in this life, the mainstay of our humanity. Without the rich and positive fruits of the Spirit, (and sadly even without their negative counterparts), we would be mere organisms.

As we read through the resurrection stories in the gospels we find all of the fruits of the Spirit in one way or another.

To take a few examples from St John's resurrection stories:-

"Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'."

Following Peter's denial, Jesus restores him with the threefold questioning,

"Do you love me...?"

To which Peter three times replies,

"Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

And can there be anything more full of goodness and generosity than the catch of the hundred and fifty-three fish after a fruitless night of fishing? I suspect it also took a lot of patience and self-control to cast the net on the other side!!

Over these past few Sundays we have been living through the weeks of Eastertide, and today is the 6th Sunday of Easter, not as in the old calendar a Sunday *after* Easter. This coming Thursday we celebrate Ascension Day, and then in a couple of weeks it will be Pentecost. But our commemorations of these great festivals are not just celebrations of past events; they are celebrations of the most important realities of human life. They rejoice in the richness and vitality of our life with God. The key to our relationship with God lies in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In today's reading from Acts, St Paul emphasises that intimacy with the divine. He quotes to his Athenian audience from one of their own Greek poets: the sixth-century BC writer Epimenides of Crete, "*In him we live and move and have our being.*", and then, "*For we too are his offspring*" from the pen of the third century BC Aratus, from Paul's own region of Cilicia.

For us today, as in any generation of history, amid the troubles and challenges of our times, we can know that God, through the fruits of the Spirit, gives us a share in the resurrection life revealed in Jesus. And in the ordinary, yet extraordinary fruits of the Spirit expressed in our own lives and the lives of everyone around us, we have a share in the resurrection life, that God, in his love for us, wishes us to have.

To the same God, be praise and glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.