



*Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon*

*24th May 2020
7th Sunday of Easter
(Sunday after Ascension Day)*

Reflection

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Have you ever been on a long car journey with a very bored child who keeps asking “are we there yet?” It’s a sore trial in many ways, particularly as usually the child has no idea where they are going or how to get there – they just want to **be** there. It’s hard to explain that its going to take hours whilst trying to drive and or navigate. It’s also very annoying.

So I have a lot of sympathy for Jesus who had much the same with his disciples who kept asking him “is it time yet for you to free Israel and restore our Kingdom?” They still had very little idea of the journey they were on, or what their destination was going to be. They were still hankering after their own idea of what Jesus was about – he was there to get rid of the Romans and put Israel in charge. Of course, we know, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, that Jesus had quite a different journey and destination in mind, an altogether bigger plan than they could ever dream of. His destination was to go on ahead to take his place again with God, to get things ready for his followers and to bring God’s world into our own.

His ascension into heaven, however hard it is to explain, was the beginning of a new world, a new relationship with God, reached through Jesus and belief in Him. It wasn’t going to be more of the same, with skirmishes and battles with the Romans. All that has now been superseded by the beginning of Christ’s church in Jerusalem. Jesus was off home and although he would return, for now he was leaving things to the apostles. He was not, however, leaving them to their own devices, or reliant upon their own resources, for he was going to send them power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Which it did and which we

celebrate every year at Pentecost. But he also leaves them something else, before the Holy Spirit came, and that was the power of prayer. The apostles used that, as we hear later in this chapter of Acts – the apostles “were constantly united in prayer”.

Understandable, when they have been told that they are to tell the whole world about Jesus. These days, with all the information technology around, getting a message to the whole world is a lot faster and easier to do than 2000 years ago when you had to physically go and deliver a message yourself, or send a messenger. That’s what happened when a king died in those days. Heralds were sent all over the kingdom to tell everyone that they had a new ruler, a new King, to obey and no doubt pay taxes to. However, the apostles’ job was more complicated than that because this new King, Jesus Christ, doesn’t want money or armies, he has no use for “stuff”. He wants everyone, from every nation, to live differently, to love one another, to help and heal one another, to care for each other and protect the vulnerable. It wasn’t how things were done in those days. To be honest, it isn’t how things are done in large parts of the world today.

It’s a job which still needs doing, this telling the world about Jesus. We all have a part to play in this great work, and we all do it differently. For example, in this next week we celebrate (according to the Lectionary) the Venerable Bede on Monday, St Augustine and John Calvin on Tuesday, Lanfranc on Thursday, and Josephine Butler and Joan of Arc on Saturday. The Venerable Bede was a monk, the most notable chronicler and ecclesiastical historian of the 7th century; St Augustine was a 4th century theologian who influenced the church reforms some 1100 year later; John Calvin was a 16th century French theologian and protestant reformer, Lanfranc was an 11th century Italian Benedictine monk who became Archbishop of Canterbury and trusted counsellor of William the Conqueror, who reformed the church in England and maintained the church’s independence from secular affairs; Josephine Butler was the 19th social reformer who campaigned for the abolition of child prostitution and human trafficking of women and young children into European prostitution along with the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and finally Joan of Arc, the young girl who became a heroine in the 100 Years war in the 15th century with her visions and tactical advice to the French side. All were staunch Christians in their own way.

All were to some extent, and in some way, following Christ’s orders to tell the world about him. We too have our part to play in this. It’s been interesting over the past few months to see how churches have adapted to being locked out of their buildings, and how resilient ministers and their flocks have become. Overnight, online services popped up all over the place, from the homespun and heartfelt to the more glossy and technically polished services. From small congregations like ours to cathedrals, from purely local to nationally televised, access to worship has never been easier, providing you can get to a radio, a tv, a phone, a letter box or a computer. Our chaplaincy has doubled the services we put on, with a regular Sunday service for anyone who wants to join us via Zoom, and a midweek Compline service too. There’s never been such a choice – on a Sunday morning I can, if I want, listen to a service in Northamptonshire, Marseille or Auckland in NZ. There are prayer resources,

reflections, poems and wonderful music flying about in all directions as people share what has moved them and helped them. And as Jamie mentioned in his e mail of resources on Thursday, before the pandemic, between 5 and 7% of the population reported attending church services, but with online provision this has increased to 24% during the crisis, with the percentage of those between the ages of 18 and 35 being higher at 34%. It has taken a crisis of global proportions to nudge people back to Christ.

‘Back to Church Sunday’, and all the other well-meaning initiatives, have often met with a good deal of squirming from regular churchgoers and excuses, largely down to reluctance to invite someone they know to come with them to church. Now there’s no excuse – just forward out the e mails about our services and the resources that we are publishing to people you know and see what happens. God moves in mysterious ways, and this is the easiest way yet for us to become Christ’s heralds. We may not be able to meet each other in a building made for the purpose, but it’s not the buildings that are the church of Christ, it’s us. We are Christ’s body in the here and now, and we need to reach out to everyone we know who is hurting, alone, frightened, ill or in despair. So go on – press send!