

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

10th May 2020 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Welcome to this week's *Sunday Supplement*. For those who are able, a service of Holy Communion is available on our YouTube channel from 7am Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMSD6j4ngi9rCe7kzY66Xfw>

You might like to have the Act of Spiritual Communion on page 4 to hand, to use the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester during the Communion.

Don't forget, that a special service for this VE Day weekend is also available on the channel:

<https://youtu.be/0FnPfiRfRnA>

An audio service of Morning Prayer is provided every day except Monday (shorter form on Sundays).

Your contributions

Thank you once again to those who read for the Sunday service and also to those who provided materials, including audio and video, to enhance the VE Day service. I appreciate that for many of us, me included, the sound of our own voice in audio or video is an unwelcome encounter – but be assured that everyone else hears us as they normally hear us. Do dare to take the plunge and contribute to our services if you have not already done so!

READINGS & COLLECT

Acts 7:55-end
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

*Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of
everlasting life:
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 for ever.
Amen.*

FOODBANK

There is good news and a conundrum. As I have made my weekly runs to the Foodbank, I have had a sense that their position has been gradually improving, as people have responded in generosity to the emergency that quickly emerged at the start of the lockdown. This week they showed me round their central store, which has been moved into the main body of Abbey Road Baptist Church, because it has outgrown the basement rooms normally used. *A picture of some of our donations this week is on page 3.*

I'm pleased to report that the Foodbank now has sufficient volume to meet demand. Crucially, through organised donations like our own, those of Extinction Rebellion, and those of corporate donors (including Tesco) they now have large bulk of items such as UHT milk, UHT fruit juice and canned goods. These can be easily parcelled out by the reduced volunteer team and the core stock can be spread out over many months.

Let's give thanks for an occasion on which our work has paid off, a need has been met. A few items are still required: I will try to convert our remaining donations into toiletries, and writing and drawing materials for children, which Foodbank volunteers have requested.

What is the conundrum? Although I suggest that we cease *bulk* giving for now, we must not forget the Foodbank as the lockdown continues and is gradually released. Employment will not instantly return. Poverty will be always with us. Please keep up the regular giving in church boxes, prioritising basic, long-lasting and healthy staples.

We must also remember that it is the nature of poverty that many people suffer from multiple and complex needs: issues relating to accommodation, education, employment, food, finance and health (including mental health) to name but a few. Deprivation also makes us vulnerable to abuse by others. We must face the fact that the state no longer makes adequate provision for the least advantaged (if it ever did). We should campaign; and we must find new ways to meet need. If you have knowledge of effective local organisations making a significant difference to overall need, with whom we could work, to let us know!

SUNDAY MESSAGE

Also available as the sermon in our video service.

The first six verses of today's passage from John are a text with which we are all especially familiar, through their frequent use at funerals. Alongside Psalms 23 and 121, this is probably one of the most frequently selected readings. I always offer it to families who ask for guidance in selecting a reading. A great find that this reading speaks to them.

It is easy to see why. In chapter 13, Jesus has washed the disciples' feet, provoking incomprehension and earning Peter two mild rebukes. He has predicted his betrayal, and has identified Judas as the betrayer to Peter and John. It is in this context, when Peter is already perhaps smarting, perhaps afraid, that his own denial is foretold.

Things seem bad. Perhaps, if Peter's comprehension and imagination are sufficient to the task, very bad indeed. Chapter 14 shows us what Jesus offers when things are very bad indeed. He begins with reassurance. The Father's house has an abundance of dwelling places and Jesus goes ahead to prepare one for each of us. He will come back, and he will take us to the heavenly rest he has made ready. Whatever may befall us, we have this unshakeable promise ever in prospect.

What, I generally ask in funeral homilies, does Jesus ask in return? Simply that we believe in God and in Him. Of course, belief in God and in Jesus Christ may well lead us to a great deal more – I hope that it does. However, at root, what is required of us is not a particular set of actions or statements, but belief in God. All else follows from the genuineness of that belief.

When they heard these words, the disciples were facing death, facing great trials, squarely in the face. That is a good time at which to contemplate the promise of Jesus. In times of trial we see a little more clearly what really matters; we can look past the trivial. That is why a bedside before death can be a deeply moving and inspiring place. At our deathbed, we don't worry about the tawdry contents of the parcel we have ordered because we cannot take it with us. But in my experience, we *might* well worry whether it will inconvenience our family to wait in for it, or inconvenience the delivery person to be turned away. We don't worry so much about the rights and wrongs of the argument we had yesterday, but about reassuring the family with whom we argued that we love them. Or we worry about whether they will be taken care of. We often see the good in the people we have been at odds with at this time of life. And, I find, for many people, the

challenges and worries about the detail of the life of faith seem to become less urgent as death approaches, but to fade away into confidence in God.

The reassurance which Jesus offers is the great consolation of true faith. It is the consolation that sustains Stephen, the first martyr, as he faces a death of the most gruesome kind in today's passage from Acts. What sustains the martyrs, I think, is two-fold. First and foremost is the promise, the prospect of God. The passage from Acts describes this in very visual form. Second, is the liberation which faith brings from the cares and desires which society constructs in and around us during our lives. Our culture prizes achievement and self-reliance: not necessarily bad things in themselves, but dangerously self-interested and individualistic. Like wealth, not bad of itself, but the nevertheless a trap for the unwary, the root of all kinds of evil.

Individualism, self-improvement in its modern sense of diet and lifestyle, is not the way of God, although it is unfortunately one of the fixations of the modern world. The reading from First Peter demonstrates what really matters. We are to be like living stones, built into a single, spiritual house. It doesn't matter what shape and size, what colour or texture our stone might be. In God's careful arrangement, we all fit together into the whole, just as we are, just as we were made. We support one another in a single body or building. We are to be a holy priesthood, looking to self-sacrifice rather than self-interest.

Our society makes it difficult to live in this way. In youth and good health, it is easy to subscribe to the fantasy of autonomy. When we begin to loosen the bonds of human making, as we do before death, we see a little more of the person that God intended us to be. We look up, as Stephen the martyr looked up, and we begin to see a little of God.

For me the crucial point in this passage comes halfway through, when Jesus makes one of his crucial "I am" statements: "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" Of these three, it seems to me that the word "way" is the hinge of the whole passage. No coincidence, I think, that early Christians regarded themselves as followers of 'The Way', a description used about six times in the Book of Acts. Christianity is not simply about beliefs, or how we live our lives. It doesn't consist simply of some philosophical positions, or of a list of things we must do in order to be good people. It is an inseparable union of intellectual truth, and the good life – brought together in one person: the Way, Jesus Christ.

Today's Gospel passage, taken in isolation, makes it sound as if Jesus is the Way out of the world. But unlike some other ancient philosophies and beliefs, Christianity has never taught that the physical world is evil and something we should wish to escape, any more than we should wish to escape the way we were individually made. On the contrary, it is of the essence of Christianity, expressed in Genesis and in John's Prologue, among other places, that the universe is made by God and is good. We also are good, because God made us, but he gave us freedom, the autonomy the modern world so prizes, and it is up to us whether we use it for good or ill. Christ came into the world to move us from alienation to reconciliation, to walk with us on the way to true life.

Jesus is just as much the way into the world as he is the way out. He is the way in which God the Father, too utterly unattainable in his perfect and infinite transcendence, came to be known intimately by us. It is impossible to miss the parallel with the prophet Isaiah:

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'*
(Isaiah 40:3-5)

Jesus is the Way, through which God has come into the world, and through whom the glory of the Lord is revealed in the world. His teachings and his company also provide a way through the world, and his promises light our way. Ultimately, they light our way out too, but we should be in no hurry, and no hesitation, about that. No-one knows the hour.

It would be remiss not to notice the possibility that Jesus is saying that he is the only way: "no-one comes to the Father except through me." At a time of remembrance, we may be worrying about the salvation of those who are dear to us. Christian theology has taken a bewildering diversity of approaches to this statement, between outright universalism (everyone will be saved) and outright particularism (only the true followers of Christ). It was from a strict evangelical particularist that I first heard the observation that "it is an article of faith that Christians will be saved, but an article of hope for each of those Christians, that everyone else will be saved too." I am reminded of Paul's words in Lystra (Acts 14) in which he says that, in past generations, God allowed all the nations to walk

in their own ways, yet still he did not leave himself without witness. All the religions of the world and all the philosophies (humanism and atheism included) witness, even if imperfectly, to this common grace, because they spring from humanity, which God made; and from the world, which God made. Psalm 19 reminds us that the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. You have to try very hard not to be following God at all.

John 10 speaks of Christ's mission to "other sheep" and First Peter speaks twice of Christ's mission to those who have fallen asleep. If you have faith in God, do not worry about what will become of other people, whether they believed or not, whether they had a chance to believe. If they are still with you, witness to them by the example of Christian living. If they are no longer with you, entrust them in your prayers to the infinite mercy and compassion of God. It far exceeds any concern we can feel. Believe in God, believe also in Christ. Follow his way; do not worry about tomorrow.

NOTICES

If you need help that you can't get elsewhere, no matter what your age or circumstances, you can email duddoncommunity@outlook.com In Kirkby, you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Linda Dean (01229) 889630. In Broughton and the valleys you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Selwyn Wright (01229) 716797.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

John Rousseau, who is in hospital with a moderate heart condition, that he hopes will be dealt with this week, at Blackpool Victoria hospital.

Closing prayer

*Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus
Christ is the way,
the truth, and the
life:
grant us to walk
in his way,
to rejoice in his
truth,
and to share his
risen life;
who is alive and
reigns, now and
for ever.
Amen.*



Part of this week's Foodbank delivery

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Prayer

You may wish to set aside a space for prayer in front of a cross and/or candle, in a part of the house which is calm and comfortable and perhaps decorated for Easter.

The Act of Spiritual Communion is best used at the time of normal church services, or as a personal response after listening to a broadcast or livestreamed service.

Guidance appears in italics. You may wish to say aloud the words in bold type.

Introduction

Begin by making the sign of the cross and thinking of those who might otherwise be sitting around you in church.



**In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Reflection

The gospel calls us to turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ. As we offer ourselves to him in penitence and faith, we renew our confidence and trust in his mercy.

**O King enthroned on high,
filling the earth with your glory:
holy is your name,
Lord God almighty.
In our sinfulness we cry to you
to take our guilt away,
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

*May the Father forgive us by the death of his Son and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit all our days.
Amen.*

The Word of God

Read one or more passages of scripture, perhaps the readings set for the day. Today's readings can be found listed earlier in this Sunday Supplement. You may wish to read the sermon.

Begin with the Collect. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the needs of the world, our community, family and friends and to the prayers you ought to offer for them.

Give thanks this week for the work of the Foodbank in Barrow, Millom and Ulverston. Reflect on variety of needs which afflict so many people in our supposedly rich and compassionate nation. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our generosity so that it may be most effective.

Spend time in silence to reflect on the issues raised in the readings or the sermon.

End with the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven... or

Our Father in heaven...

Prayer for Communion

This prayer may also be used at the appropriate point while watching a live or recorded service of Holy Communion.

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.**

(After the prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Closing prayers

Heavenly Father, we share together the blessing of your presence. Give us in this life knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'

**The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. Amen.**