Sunday 19th April, 2nd of Easter, Low Sunday Revd Steph Jenner

Forever the people of God have cried for help in the words of Psalm 16 (verse 1)

‘Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.’

Prayer of Praise and Confession

We praise you, Our God, for knowing that whilst separated we are still one in your name and together we can worship the risen Jesus Christ in all times and places with our sisters and brothers…*Take a moment and picture, or even speak the names of, those who you would have with you as we continue this act of worship*…

We confess that we haven’t been our best selves: we have been selfish where we could have been generous; we have grumbled and moaned when we could have been kind; we have gossiped and misinformed when we needed to check our facts; we have found life difficult with little rejoicing.

We know that God understands our frightenedness, our doubt, and forgivingly answers, ‘Do not be afraid.’ May we forever seek this courage, in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

Hymn StF 636/ H&P 685

1. O love that wilt not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in thee:

I give thee back the life I owe,

that in thine ocean depths its flow

may richer, fuller be.

1. O light that followest all my way,

I yield my flickering torch to thee;

my heart restores its borrowed ray,

that in thy sunshine’s blaze its day

may brighter, fairer be.

1. O joy that sleekest me through pain,

I cannot close my heart to thee:

I trace the rainbow through the rain,

and feel the promise is not vain,

that morn shall tearless be.

1. O cross that liftest up my head,

I dare not ask to fly from thee:

I lay in dust life’s glory dead,

and from the ground there blossoms red

life that shall endless be.

George Matheson

Reading John 20: 19 – 31 (NRSV)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, 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.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Low Sunday

The Sunday after Easter is traditionally called ‘Low Sunday’ as a contrast to the ‘high’ of Easter Sunday, but maybe this year especially it reflects the mood of the churches, the nation and perhaps ourselves.

We can see from today’s set Gospel reading that our experience is not that different from what the followers of Jesus experienced after the first Easter Sunday. They are inside, in fear, not really knowing what to do. The difference is that they are together, and they are allowed out, but they choose not to, because they are afraid.

But even into that locked room, Jesus is able to meet them, dispel their fear, bring them peace and lead them to rejoicing – our locked doors will not keep Jesus ‘out there’ but still allow him ‘in here’; as promised ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ [Matthew 28:20]. In John’s Gospel, Jesus also breathes the Holy Spirit on them and sends them out into the world.

In this first appearance, Jesus first proves that it is indeed himself, by showing his wounds, and then proves he is alive by breathing on them. But this is not enough for Thomas, he needs to see and touch for himself. It is not lost on us Jesus’ words that many do not have the opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh, as it were, but they still believe the words of the disciples. Maybe Thomas also highlights that the male disciples did not believe the words of the women at the tomb, but they had to see for themselves.

We see in our time of lockdown, that there are still too many around the world who will not believe the danger until they see it for themselves, unfortunately this also affects the rest of us; people do not change, we have to be more convincing in our words, and our actions.

But perhaps the one thing in this reading that speaks to me most is that Jesus returned, not fully healed, but still bearing visible scars. He was not made whole, not ‘healed’, not washed clean, but continuing to bear the marks of his ordeal, his experience, his pain and suffering. To those who are ashamed and hide the scars of their own life experience, or who do not feel whole, or are made to feel they are not trying hard enough to be healed, Jesus reflects you, and you are reflected in the Risen Christ. In this, whatever you are going through, whether you are afraid, staying at home, doubting, or unwell, ill in body, mind or spirit, Jesus says ‘Peace be with you’ and ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ and asks us to share the Good News of new life.

Prayers for others

We ask for God’s peace and blessing on:

those of us who fear, and those who doubt;

those of us whose self, family and friends are caring for others; are keyworkers; are furloughed; are unemployed and volunteering; are at home self isolating;

those of us who are unwell or infirm temporarily, with long-term illness or disability, with age;

those of us who are struggling for food and necessities;

those of us who are frustrated and tempted to break the rules;

those of us, like Christ, have unhealed wounds and scars;

those of us for who life has changed and those for who it has not;

may we all find comfort and new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn H&P 651

1. God be with you till we meet again;

May he through the days direct you;

May he in life’s storms protect you;

God be with you till we meet again.

1. God be with you till we meet again;

And we when doubts and fears oppress you,

May his holy peace possess you;

God be with you till we meet again.

1. God be with you till we meet again;

In distress his grace sustain you;

In success from pride restrain you;

God be with you till we meet again.

1. God be with you till we meet again;

May he go through life beside you,

And through death in safety guide you;

God be with you till we meet again.

Donald Hughes

A blessing to share until we meet again:

May your past be a pleasant memory,
Your future filled with delight and mystery,
Your now a glorious moment,
That fills your life with deep contentment.