

Issue 8
11th May 2020

For these days ...

'My times are in your hands.'

Psalm 31.15

Lectionary Readings

Acts 7.55-60

Psalm 31.1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2. 2-10

John 14. 1-14

Hymns

416, 'Christ is alive'

54556, 'I need thee every hour'

543, 'Longing for light'

Dear friends, I hope that you are all doing well as the weeks roll over. The Corona Virus has touched all the world and I can't begin to imagine what it must be like to be facing COVID-19 in places where there is no running water, shelter or medical provision. This week is Christian Aid week and although we can't donate in the usual way, we can still do so online – please consider giving. This Saturday, Rev Dr Martin Fair will be installed as the new Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Although the Assembly is cancelled, the work of the church continues and Martin's installation will happen live on Saturday 16th May at 11am. This can be watched on Facebook or the Church of Scotland website. On Sunday past I was delighted to see so many of you in our Zoom meeting. It's my plan to do this again Sunday by Sunday, but at different times, so that we can hear and see one another more easily, so please look out for the link and join us! There is also a weekly virtual coffee time on a Monday at 2pm and 8pm organised by Liz Stewart that folks are very welcome to join. Last, but by no means least, please do continue to save your Sunday free will offerings. These are difficult times and our offerings – of time, talents and money - are needed like never before to support the ongoing work of our congregations.

Prayer

In the familiar surroundings of our homes,
We come,
Just as we are,
To worship you the living God,
Who is not bound by place and time,
But is eternal and present,
Loving and faithful,
Welcoming and gracious,
And unites the church through Jesus your Son,
And whether we are coping well or struggling,
Energised or exhausted,
Weighed down by guilt or feeling free,

You see and know and love each one.

And so,
as we worship today,
Separated by distance,
May we remember that in you we are connected.

As we sing and pray today,
confidently or quietly,
may we trust that you hear every word and plea.

And as we listen and reflect today,
As seekers and followers,
May we sense your calling our names,
Trusting that in Jesus we have seen your love,
And follow His ways into the world.
So be it,
Amen.

Reading

John 14.1-14

Jesus the Way to the Father

14 “Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe^[a] in God and believe also in me. ² There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so.^[b] ³ And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. ⁴ You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”

⁶ Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. ⁷ Now that you have known me,” he said to them, “you will know^[c] my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”

⁹ Jesus answered, “For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “do not come from me. The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. ¹¹ Believe me when I

say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. ¹² I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me^[d] for anything in my name, I will do it.

Reflection

Our text today will be familiar to many. It is quite often read at funerals and, in the past week, I have used these words in the hope that they might offer comfort to those who are grieving, as Jesus says, 'set your troubled hearts at rest.' There is no doubt that these words are comforting to many, as Jesus talks about God the Father's house having many rooms and Jesus heading off to prepare a place and then coming back again to take his disciples there. We get the sense of God being welcoming and inclusive and the idea of going home. That is a comfort to many as we think about life after death. However, we have a God who invites us into a way of life before death and that is what strikes me most this week.

A few days ago I was having a conversation with Grace. Quite out of the blue, she said, 'there's only one God isn't there Mummy?' 'Yes, that's what I believe,' I replied. 'And Jesus is God's surname,' came the response. 'No, Jesus is God's son.' There was then a pause and the conversation about God was ended by Grace with the words, 'well the most important thing is that God is in your heart.'

God is in your heart. That's really stayed with me, especially as I've explored these words about comfort, because it's also a passage with great challenge as Jesus invites his disciples to take a risk and says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' His disciples are confused and Thomas – thank goodness for Thomas! – pipes up, 'Lord, we don't have a scooby where you are going, so how can we possibly get there.' And then Jesus says, if you've seen me, Jesus – seen his ways (the way he treats other people, his loving and serving, his compassion and mercy), then you have seen God – because the father and son are one. Then he goes on to say something quite remarkable. He says that the disciples will go on to do even greater things than he has done. Just stop and think about that for a moment. It's truly mind blowing!

When we think about home and God's house, when we think about church, so often we see them as places. Destinations that can be pinpointed on a map, that we can find our way to. We go to God's house to worship, to seek peace, be comforted and hopefully challenged. We go there to meet up with fellow seekers and followers, to support and encourage one another, laugh and cry together and

ultimately find ways to love and serve in the world. Hopefully in the midst of all of that we meet God, but not because we are in a particular building, but because we are there together, in God's name and God dwells in us.

Grace hit it on the head. The most important thing is that God is in your heart, showing us the way, through the Spirit. Enabling, empowering, emboldening us to live lives full of love, whether gathered or scattered. And we are doing it – every time a name or face pops into your head and you pick up the phone, or write a letter or send a card. Every time you check on a neighbour, or make a face mask, knit a love heart, or donate money or food to the foodbank or charity. In so many ways the church is showing God's love in the world. Of course, this is not a new thing! It goes back to what Jesus said to his disciples: 'believe me when I say – those who believe in me will do what I do, because I am going to the Father.' And because Jesus has done so, the promised Spirit came, ensuring that Jesus was no longer bound by place and time, but could be in hearts of believers everywhere.

As the weeks roll on and we stay safe in our houses, I'm reminded more than ever of the truth we so often sing about on a Sunday: 'The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people!' We are the living stones, no longer bound by buildings, and we are called to follow the one no longer bound by place or time. Jesus invites us all to take a risk, see his ways and make them known in ours for the glory of God. There is no time to lose.

Prayer

Jesus,
Who is the way, the truth and the life,
We pray for all homes this day,
And the people within them.

For those on their own,
Feeling fragile and alone.

For new parents,
Desperate to show off their baby and needing some support.

For only children,
Craving the company of other young people.

For single parents,
Exhausted and doing their best to cope on their own.

For families home schooling,
Doing their best to juggle work and home life.

For couples,
Spending more time together in the same space.

For scared children and adults,
Terrified to be spending so much time at home.

For the hungry,
The tired,
The sick and the grieving,
And those who don't even have a place to call home.

Lord, in the silence, hear our prayers ...

Silence

Jesus,
May we your church,
Do our best to live into your ways,
So that hope, peace, comfort, compassion, justice and welcome may
be seen in ours,
As we stay safe and follow you into a new week.
We ask it all in your name and in the words you taught us to say
together:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ... amen.

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