

## Online Sermon for Church at Home, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love Amen*

So here we are, on Trinity Sunday, at the culmination of the story of our salvation. We've celebrated the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; his ascension into heaven, and - after ten remarkable days of prayer, last Sunday - we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. + I can't let go of that wonderful picture, from last Sunday, of the lit candle (symbol of the Holy Spirit) being passed from person to person... as we were all commissioned to carry the light of Christ into the dark places of our world.

And today it's as if, at the beginning of Ordinary Time – which is, actually, anything but Ordinary – the Church pauses to draw breath, and to reflect on the being of our great God, who is behind it all: One holy creator God, the author of life, who holds all things in being... and yet at the same time, is three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a God of mission. And today, in our Collect, we ask God to enlarge our minds with the knowledge of his truth **and** to draw us ever more deeply into the mystery of his love... because, in the end, faith is always more than understanding, embracing our whole being and life, as we are drawn into the very life of God. Praise him!

And within this vast panoramic vision of faith, today's readings draw our attention to two particular poles of our human experience, each of which are met by God's Word. And it's these that I want to focus on this morning, because both are remarkably relevant to this time of global pandemic; and both elicit for us, profound spiritual insights – about the being of God – which speak into our need.

Firstly our experience of weariness and exhaustion, in these locked-down days; and secondly, our experience of uncertainty, as we look out on the world and our future within it. Our weariness, and our uncertainty... as we look back, and as we face the future, not knowing quite what's round the corner. Well I hope that today – Trinity Sunday - may provide something of a bridge, between the past and the future, as we look to God to save and help us, and as we begin the process of discerning, together, what God's future might look like.

In our first reading, from Isaiah 40, the prophet is speaking into a people who are weary, embattled and exhausted. He's talking to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, following their deportation in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century before Christ. And one can almost feel the atmosphere of weariness, nostalgia and melancholy, as we read between the lines – and listen out for the dew of hope that God, through the prophet, gives them. Just before our reading, the striking words, 'Comfort, O comfort my people'...

and from verse 28, to a people struggling to trust that God is still with them, we hear these remarkable words, which resonate with us today:

'Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

The Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;

His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,

And strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,

And the young will fall exhausted;

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.'

Yes, the people may be exhausted, they may be homesick for loved ones and holy places, they may struggle – in the midst of their wilderness – to hope... but God, the creator of the ends of the earth, of the world in all its beauty and glory, is still with them, and cares for them, and he will restore them and renew their strength.

He is both a God of universal creative power, and at the same time, one concerned intimately with the faint and the powerless. And what could be more relevant to us and our world today – wherever we are on the spectrum of need or weariness – during the coronavirus pandemic?

A lock-down world, for many, of loneliness and fear; a world of sickness and economic woe; a world, in many places, of social turbulence and injustice; of the forgotten and the left-behinds. A world looking for a God to provide power, not to the powerful, but to the faint and the powerless; and new energy to all who are exhausted or who have lost their way.

And if Isaiah speaks to a people who are weary and exhausted – reminding them of the awesome majesty of God, our Creator, who cares for them; what about Matthew? Well we hear again, in today's Gospel, Matthew 28, of Jesus' great words to the disciples, just before his Ascension, when he meets their uncertainty (after the roller-coaster ride of his death & resurrection) with his empowering commission to go out and proclaim the Gospel to all creation:

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’

Imagine for a moment how the disciples must have been feeling. First there was the joy ride of his ministry, witnessing the awesome power of God... then there was the pathos of Holy Week, his passion and death... and finally, the surprise of his resurrection, and the joy of cherished days with him again. But now Jesus is leaving them, and they have no idea what’s coming next, or how they’re to face a world forever changed. What are they going to do? Where are they going to go? And who is going to help them? The task seems so vast, and resources so limited.

And maybe it’s a bit like that with us... We know there is a world of opportunity and need out there, but we’re unsure what the future will hold, because the world has changed, as a result of COVID-19. Some of us are still unable to go out, because lock-down remains, or our loved ones are in the shielded category. Others may have lost jobs or been furloughed, and none of us know what shape our economy will take, in the months to come. We may be restless to get out there and pick up where we left off; we may be full of pent up energy and desire to use our talents, yet frustrated because so much is still on hold. Or we may be genuinely uncertain about what difference we’ll be able to make, or how we’ll recover the confidence to play our part...

And please do pray for our PCC as we begin the difficult task of planning for St John’s re-opening and discerning what shape our church life may take, as we anticipate a new normal, post-lockdown.

Well there’s no doubt for us, then, uncertain as well as weary, that God is at work, and that the commission of Jesus, to the disciples, speaks directly into our situation. Because Jesus commissions us too, in the name of the Holy Trinity, to proclaim His Good News – to teach, baptize and make disciples – in other words to witness to Jesus Christ with our whole being and life, as members of his Body in the world.

We may not yet be allowed out properly; many of our young people are not yet back at school or college; and the doors of St John’s may still be closed... but today we are all empowered by God to be his people in the world: through prayer and study and acts of service, all of us have a part to play, sharing in the work of God in mission. The God who, through the love of Christ and power of his Spirit, is still at work, re-shaping our world today, into the life of his kingdom.

So, today, as we celebrate the Holy Trinity, we remember – in our weariness – that God our Creator indeed refreshes and sustains us, and – in our uncertainty – that our Lord Jesus Christ empowers us and sends us out, in the power of his Spirit, to live and work to his praise and glory. *Amen*