

Jesus has given us his peace

Homily Easter 6 by Canon Alison Tyler

Acts 16: 9-15

Revelation 21:10-22:5

John 14: 23-29

We are starting to think about the post Resurrection future in our readings this morning, the future in several different ways. In Acts we get a glimpse of the missionary church as Paul and his companions go to Macedonia, the writer, either Luke himself or the first person source he quoted was actually there on that journey, at Lydia's baptism when she and her whole household were baptised, and just how exciting is a baptism? That moment of commitment and dedication, either as a child or an adult, it is the opportunity, the opening if you like for God's Spirit to act in someone's life, for their future to be transformed by the new life made possible by the risen Christ . All things are possible for the Spirit, unruly and unpredictable like the wind, or the storm.

And then we have as our second reading a part of the vision from Revelation, of the holy city of Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, it sounds just like a vision of the end times, more about rapture and the excitement of God's presence, than reason, and very hard to understand, best really for us to just enjoy the vision of a place of light and the glory of God's continual presence – a place of peace and healing, when all will be alight with the glory of the Lamb, with love and wonder and the hope that death is not the end but a new beginning

We finish with a passage from John's gospel, from the first part of the farewell discourses as they are called, as Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for his departure both for his arrest, trial and death, but also for his eventual resurrection, his return to heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit. With this passage we can today look both to the future and also to the past, forward to the Ascension and to Pentecost and back to Holy Week.

Jesus's words work for both sets of circumstances, which is possibly why we have them as our gospel reading here, to help us to prepare for the Ascension which we will celebrate on 26th May, and to remind us of the great gift of life from death that we have in Jesus.

In a way the Ascension may be almost worse for the disciples than Holy

Week, when they will have had such a tumultuous mix of experiences of misery on the one hand followed by the joy of the Resurrection on the other, and then to see Jesus finally physically leave them forever, leaving them with the promise of the Spirit to come, It could be devastating for them. They will only fully understand what he has been saying, after all these things have finished happening and he has returned to glory of the Father, from which he came.

So, as he prepares himself for what is to come, Jesus speaks to the disciples of the love he and the Father share with them and with each other. If we love Jesus, we will keep his words and he promises that the Father and Son will make their home with us always. Jesus also tells them they will receive the gift of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will come to them, comfort them and remind them of his teachings and also continue to make his teachings increasingly clear to them. Jesus is clearly not going to leave them alone and without support.

His own parting gift to them is his peace. They will be in turmoil and distress as Jesus is led through Holy week to the Cross, there will be disbelief and sorrow for his death, outrage at way it comes about, shock and surprise, fear and anger. They will be terrified and bereft, feeling abandoned.

The very day after he speaks these words to his disciples, they and indeed the whole world will see the immense outpouring of his love on the Cross, a love which remains the same, yesterday, today and forever, and is accessible to all of us.

So, Jesus says to them

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid....” Jesus did not have a lot to leave in worldly terms, but he left them his peace, which as St Paul said passes all understanding.

I sometimes wonder what Jesus meant ,when he said I do not give to you as the world gives, perhaps, he meant the world gives unwillingly, grudgingly, wanting something in exchange, or gives with one hand and takes with the other, or gives, but conditionally, with strings attached, or ungenerously as little as possible, it probably though does not mean giving good things. It might mean something like the pax Romana of the

Roman Empire, military conquest and then settlement, with peace which is the absence of war and the exploitation of the conquered.

It serves as a useful reminder to us, to teach us to think carefully about how we give and in what spirit ...

Christ offers real peace. We can see it in the lives of those we know who have given their lives to Christ. They are not afraid, they believe as Paul wrote to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us," and so they have peace, and very often it is peace with joy, as they become peacemakers themselves, and as Matthew reminds us, they are called the children of God.

Jesus's gift is peace, his giving is wholehearted and generous, and significantly his Resurrection greeting in Upper Room is "Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, so I send you" and the message we have been sent to share is that peace.

We are living in troubled and dangerous times, of war and conflict in many places, of fragmentation and social, economic, and political problems. I wish I could say that Jesus' peace will fix things and make everything better. Sadly, I don't think it works like that. His peace is not necessarily the absence or ending of conflict, and the resolution of all our problems. His peace is more about what's going on in our own hearts and minds, rather than what is going on around us.

A heart at peace always sees others as fully human even in the midst of conflict and disagreement. When my heart is at peace the hopes, fears, and needs of others are as real to me as my own. If my heart is divided or in conflict, then I can more easily ignore others or treat them badly

The peace that Jesus gives us is a call for us to be peace, to become peace for and with others, to bring our peace into the chaos and conflict. To live with a heart at peace is to be wholeheartedly seeking to become a part of the answers to our own prayers, loving God and our neighbours, seeking the right relationships with each other.

The challenge is always what might that look like for us today?

Jesus has given ***us his peace***. What will we do with it, how will we use it for sharing the good news?