

May 17th 2020 Sermon for 6th Sunday after Easter –

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### **Collect for 5th Sunday of Easter**

God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son; grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

**Bible Reading** Acts 17:22-31

**Gospel Reading** John 14:15-21

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Let us pray. Heavenly Father may the words that I speak be faithful to the written Word and lead us to the Living Word who is Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

There was an amazing story, a really poignant story that came out of Italy a few weeks ago. It was about an elderly man who had suffered and survived Coronavirus and as he was leaving hospital, he was being presented with his invoice for the treatment that he had received. And then he was so overcome with emotion that the good doctor, the kind doctor said “can we help, don't worry” but the elderly man said “no, no, I can pay for my treatment that's not a problem. It's just that I've suddenly realised that for the last 90 years I have been breathing in oxygen free of charge, and I've only just realised.”

I guess this time that we're living through has made us all think and reassess and value of certain things that perhaps we've always taken for granted. Little things that so often go unnoticed and now are very precious to us. We know what we're missing; family, friends, loved ones. We know what we want to do when this lockdown is finally over. And we also know what is giving us joy and is helping right now in lockdown. One of the things that has been of immense value to many of us is our faith. And many of us are rediscovering that faith and its becoming reignited in us as we once again learn how to pray, as we spend more time with God as we read our Bibles and we search our Bibles for those passages that will answer our questions that will bring us comfort or bring us hope, bring us a sense of future in all of this.

Our reading from St John's Gospel really kind of speaks to us at this time. It comes at that point in the Gospel where the narrative is shifting from Jesus' ministry amongst the towns and villages of Galilee and is now focussing on Jerusalem, upon the cross and why Jesus' death and resurrection is so necessary. Not only necessary in to bring forgiveness for our

sins and to conquer death, but also is the point where the kingdom of God is established here on earth through the Son of God dying for us on the cross and rising again. And in this Gospel reading Jesus promises that after He has died on the cross and has risen and ascended to heaven; he will give to us the gift of his Holy Spirit. Now in many ways, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a little bit like oxygen. It's always been there, its been present since the very beginning of Creation. If you read the book of Genesis and the story of Creation you will know that before anything came into existence God is, and then when God speaks Creation comes into being. It is the Holy Spirit that hovers over the waters of creation. It's there, the breath of God breathing life into every living creature and continues to breath life into every living creature. Without the Holy Spirit, like oxygen, we would not exist.

It is interesting that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is mentioned but it seems to be mentioned at specific times and it seems to be the gift that is given to specific people for specific purposes. For great men and women of the Old Testament they may receive the Holy Spirit as a way of being able to carry out that task, that duty that God has for them. But that soffit is shifting. In our reading and as Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to come, he's really talking about the establishment of this kingdom and he is saying to his disciples that they're going to be part of this new work, this new beginning, this life, this creation, this kingdom, and he's giving to them as the gift of his Holy Spirit. But this time it will be different. This Holy Spirit is given to everyone because everybody has a place and a purpose within this new kingdom.

If we fast-forward a little bit to Pentecost and if we read that story of Pentecost in the book of Acts you will know how the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and they begin to speak in many different languages, many different tongues. And there in Jerusalem are people from all over the world and they hear the disciples speaking in their own language and the question then is 'what does all of this mean?' and surely it is the sign of God, that the Gospel, the Good News – the Good News of Jesus, the Good News of the kingdom – is to be spread across the world. The Good News is for all people who hear and believe and turn to God and receive this gift of new life, new beginnings, of the new kingdom. The Holy Spirit is there for all who wish to receive it.

It's interesting that in the Gospel reading for today the word that Jesus uses and John records is the word *parakletos* in Greek and that literally means 'the one who is called in' or we might say 'the one who is called in to help'. And so often, in our English translations that work *parakletos* is translated to either advocate or to comforter. And in many ways both are appropriate. But both describe the sense of which the Holy Spirit is called in to help.

I think all of us, if we're totally honest, there are times that we can be fearful, there are times that we can feel discouraged, there are times when we can feel a sense of failure, but then there are the times when the Holy Spirit seems to intervene. Maybe a friend is prompted to call us and just comes out with the right words of encouragement. Or that same friend listens to us as we share with them our frustrations, our disappointments, the issues that we're facing and they listen and they understand and we realise that we're not on our own. And there are other times perhaps where in our frustration, in our disappointment, we just have that word of inspiration that seems to just sort of illuminate and gives us the way forward out of a particular problem. Sometimes we may recall a key verse – all out of the

blue, something that perhaps we learned off by heart years and years ago and then suddenly it comes to us, into our minds, into our hearts and suddenly comes alive with meaning and purpose and hope for us. Maybe there is a passage that we're reading in Scripture and suddenly something, some sort of insight or revelation just hits us and those words, that passage, just seems just right for us. And so the Holy Spirit just brings our faith alive, it makes our faith dynamic.

I guess all of us can read Scripture, we can read about Jesus, we can come to our own conclusions about who he is or what his death and resurrection mean. We can think those things, we can come to an understanding, we can have a theory about Jesus and what the Christian faith is about, but it's the Holy Spirit that brings it alive that makes it real for us but it's something that we don't just think about but something that we experience for ourselves.

The Holy Spirit, I think, is a gift. A gift that is offered to us. A gift that is not imposed upon us, but one where we need to open up our hearts and our minds to receive what God wants to offer us. It's a gift that he wants to give to us to show us that we are part of his purpose, his plan. To confirm to us that we belong to him and that we belong in his kingdom. There are times in this time of lockdown in particular, but often in life in general where we can often feel alone and afraid, but what Jesus says in our passage is "I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you. Before long the world will not see me anymore but you will see me because I live, and you also will live."

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. And the Holy Spirit is at odds with a world that is so often full of lies and deceit. A couple of weeks ago we were looking at the passage where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd and he says that the sheep will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow. He goes on to say that the thief comes to steal and rob life, that's the Devil, and he Jesus has come so that we might have life and have life in all its fullness. The sheep follow the shepherd to new pastures, to new life. The Holy Spirit enables us to hear that voice of the Good Shepherd. And so in this time of lockdown as our time of prayer is renewed, as we look to help others, to encourage others, to support others particularly those who are in need. As we obey Jesus' command to love one another, so the reality of our faith comes alive, so we see more for ourselves just how much God loves us, how much that he is willing to die for us on the cross that he will rise again that he will send his Holy Spirit, this comforter, the advocate, the one who he calls in to help us.

I pray that in this time of lockdown we might draw closer to Jesus and discover for ourselves afresh the gift of faith; a faith that comes alive through the Holy Spirit so that we might have life in all its fullness.

Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do. Breathe on me breath of God until my heart is pure, until my will is one with yours to do and to endure. Breathe on me breath of God so shall I never die but live with you the perfect life for all eternity.

Let us open our hearts and minds to the gift of his Holy Spirit so that we might live and be assured of his love and purpose for each one of us in his kingdom. Amen.