

22nd May 2020

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you after having taken a few days off, obviously I didn't go anywhere, and after writing this I will return to some time off, and will probably continue with my staycation in my house and garden, doing some reading, some drawing and some pottering about, I must admit it has done me good not to be glued to emails and to meetings on screens.

As I write I am aware that we are almost through the Easter Season, with this Sunday being the last Sunday in Easter, and that next week is Pentecost. Yesterday if you were so minded you might have celebrated the Ascension of Jesus, and that is where our reading and reflection will come from today. That said I just had to check my phone to see what the date is today, and some days I am not sure what day it is! Thursdays are often a fixed point in the week as people go out of their homes to clap for the carers who are doing such an amazing job. That said I think we all are, when you stay at home and would rather be out, when you step aside to give someone space to pass, when you are patient in the supermarket queue, you are practicing not only care, but also the kind of waiting that is focused and hopeful. One day we will look back on this strange time, I wonder what stories we will tell?

Jesus disciples were also in a waiting time, like us they were given no fixed ending to it, and no map for the way forward, following the resurrection confusion was still a huge part of their lives as they struggled to make sense of this risen Jesus who kept appearing and disappearing among them.

Today we pick up the story in John 17 Jesus has gathered his disciples together and told them that they will not be left alone, and that just as he is with God and in God, so he will be with them. Take courage he says, for I have conquered the world, or as some versions put it, I have overcome the world. I wonder which of those words sits more comfortably with you, and why? You might like to ponder that for a moment before you read this week's Bible passage. Again, this is Jesus speaking to his disciples before the crucifixion, offering words of comfort that they must have returned to in the waiting time:

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17: 1-11)

Jesus knows what lies ahead of him, and of his followers, he knows they will be heartbroken, confused, amazed and that their lives will never be the same again, he knows that as part of the divine plan that this scared and confused group will soon be filled with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he is asking his Father to sustain them through the waiting time.

We too have the gift of the Holy Spirit to help to guide and sustain us in this time, Christ has given us his Spirit that we might be guided into all the wisdom and ways of God. God longs for his love to be made known to all, and to be shared with all, and it was the gift of the Holy Spirit in those gathered disciples that began his great work of commissioning the church on earth to be the Body of Christ, in different expressions and gifts and talents and with different graces that church is still alive and well in you and in me, and in many millions of others today. Just stop and engage with how amazing that is!

So, as we move towards another major celebration of the church where we will not be gathered in our buildings, we can still celebrate that we are truly not alone and that God in Christ is with through the gift of the Spirit. While we may be feeling disoriented and bereft, just as the disciples were when just as they were getting used to the risen Jesus appearing and disappearing, he announced that he was returning to his Father and was lifted into the heavens before their eyes, telling them to wait, so we wait, but we can wait with hope, because we know the story that propelled them into a completely new way of being.

My word of caution would only be that we do not know what the future will hold, we may have to adapt to a new way of being for a considerable length of time, and that will not be easy, we may not have a definite direction of travel, and that will be challenging, and we may not be able to get back to how we were because we will and dare I say should have changed! But the one who leads us is faithful and will sustain us.

As I often do I leave you with the words of a hymn, and the invitation to call me to talk if you would like to, and the assurance that I am holding you in my prayers. Please feel free to share this letter with anyone you would like to.

*In Christ there is no East or West
No North or South;
Only one great love
Inside and out*

*True hearts everywhere
Some deaf and some blind
Singin' one melody
Lost souls cannot find*

*Join hands and have faith
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me*

*In Christ now meet both East and West
There is no black or white
Only one great love
Hatred cannot divide*

*Join hands and have faith
Forgive your enemy
Surely we're all a part
Of one big family*

*Join hands and have faith
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me*

May God bless you and keep you



Reverend Sally Coleman