

Sunday 19th April 2020

Jesus says “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Hymn: Jesus is Lord of all the earth (295 in Singing the Faith)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

Let us pray:

Glory to you.

Our Lord and our God!

After your resurrection Lord, the disciples gathered behind closed doors.

Your appeared to them,

You gave them your peace,

And when Thomas saw your hands and your sides, he believed.

Forgive us Lord when we doubt you,

Forgive us when we do not trust you,

Forgive us when we think we know best.

Remove our doubts O Lord, so that we may proclaim with conviction that you are our Lord and our God.

Amen

Bible Readings

1 Peter ch1, v3-9

John ch20, v19-31

Hymn: Purify my heart (508 in Singing the Faith)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y8zP34AhuU>

As we are starting to learn how to ‘be church’ in ways that perhaps we weren’t so familiar with before, the question has been asked (at least I’ve seen it on FaceBook) whether church will ever be the same again. Will we for example, when lockdown is over and we are allowed to gather together again, simply take up our pews and resume normal service, or will we continue with some of the new things we’ve taken on board. In a sense, we are in the midst of a past, present and future conundrum.

If we look at our first reading for today, Peter reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus has taken place (*past*) and it is through the resurrection that we are given new life and new hope. He then describes the inheritance which is waiting for us in heaven (*future*), an inheritance that he says will never perish, spoil or fade.

Or in other words:

- Jesus Christ suffered death and was raised again for us that we might live for Him
- We will share fully the eternal joy of all believers in the presence of God.

I guess none of this stretches our intellect too far and I can say with some confidence that this is something in which we greatly rejoice. But then Peter spoils things by moving onto the present saying:

“..... ***though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.***”

Now to be clear, and although it might seem a reasonable line of enquiry for some, I do not subscribe to a view that our God, a God of infinite grace, deliberately causes grief or is responsible for the pandemic that currently threatens the world as we know it. What I do believe however, is that our God encourages and inspires us through His Holy Spirit, to carry out acts of love, mercy, kindness and selflessness in the face of this global threat.

We are seeing and hearing heart-warming stories of people and communities rallying round to support one another. Over 8,000 people in Leeds have registered as volunteers with Voluntary Action Leeds to provide much needed support for vulnerable people and those most at risk from the virus. I’ve seen stories of people making meals and leaving them out with signs that say, “for anyone who needs it”. I know of people who are shopping or collecting medicines for neighbours, I’ve even heard that the tooth fairy and Easter Bunny have been given ‘key-worker status’ so as not to disappoint young children.

And how we respond as followers of Christ is, according to Peter at least, how we prove the genuineness of our faith. A faith that Peter tells us is worth so much more to God than gold, and a faith which will result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

So, this is the point at which I ask you to spend a few minutes contemplating your own response to the coronavirus – how loving, merciful, kind and selfless are you being? And for the record, yes, I do include not going out and putting others at risk as being selfless! But think too, what else are you doing? what else could you do? and what else are you going to do? And will you carry on doing it when all this is over?

Peter concludes this section of his letter by saying:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls”.

This is vitally important. Remember that we have read in John’s Gospel, that Thomas had heard Jesus was alive again but didn’t believe it. It was only after he saw the risen Jesus for himself that He believed.

We too have not seen the risen Jesus. Our faith then is not based on what we have seen but rather on what we believe, and that means we are both blessed and filled with that inexpressible and glorious joy.

Wouldn’t it be a great shame in these difficult times that our world and communities are facing, if we didn’t share that blessing?

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for all the places in the world that need your peace.

We pray for all the people in the world who need your healing.

We pray for carers, paid and unpaid, who need your strength.

We pray for world leaders who need your wisdom.

We pray for all who are fearful and anxious.

We pray for all who find it hard to trust you.

We pray for all who have lost loved ones.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayers.

Amen

Lord’s Prayer

Hymn: To God be the glory (94 in Singing the Faith)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

Blessing

May the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen

