

Sermon for Sunday 10 May 2020 Easter 5 Year A

Readings: Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5,15-16; 1 Peter 2.2-10; **John 14.1-14**

Sermon

Today's gospel reading is well known as the saying of Jesus that he is **'the way, the truth and the life'** and it is often also chosen as a reading in funeral services, because it has within these verses, spoken at the last supper, Jesus' promise that he goes ahead of us to prepare a place for us in God's presence.

Perhaps in these days of the Covid-19 pandemic we have been faced a bit more than usual with our own mortality. During the last century with advances in medicine most people, particularly in the developed world have been sheltered from the fact that we, as humans, are frail beings and that as the psalmist said: *'My times are in your hand'*-(Ps 31 v15) for we can be snatched away from this existence at any time. In recent weeks we have seen young and healthy people reduced to fighting for their lives, and even with the intervention of doctors, nurses and intensive care- not all of those people pulling through, in fact even some of those care staff have also succumbed to an untimely death. It is a wake up call to many.

We are not God. **God** is the one who holds our times in his hand- from our very conception to our final breath. **But** that is not the whole picture. We are promised by Jesus that he indeed is going ahead of us to prepare a place for us in God's presence, and he does not expect any of us to make that journey alone – as so many are fearful of doing in hospital at present, He promises: ***'I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.'***

Move forward to the next day- that dark day we now call Good Friday, and Jesus himself was able to pray in his dying breath on the cross, when to all intents and purposes it would have seemed that he had been delivered into the hands of his enemies but taking strength from what would have been familiar words from Psalm 31. Luke's gospel (23:46) tells us that 'Jesus called out with a loud voice, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**" When he had said this, he breathed his last.'

'Into your hand I commit my spirit;' (Ps 31:5) is the same prayer echoed again by Stephen the very first Christian to be martyred, whose story we had in our reading from Acts- witnessed by Paul , or as he was known then Saul. Stephen

was given the vision of Jesus coming to greet him from by the right hand of the throne of God the father.... What a promise, what a vision, and how amazing are the prayers of both Jesus and Stephen for the forgiveness of those who tormented and killed them.

We do not need to be scared of death- for we have Christ, who has gone before, coming back for us -as our friend, our saviour, our brother and our redeemer to guide us through to an eternal loving relationship with him and the Father. We know that we are called (as Peter says in his epistle) to become part of that 'chosen people, royal priesthood and Holy nation of God's own people to proclaim his love and his mighty acts' to those around us. That might seem a tall order, but we are not doing it on our own. Jesus promised that each step of the way we will have him with us guiding us through his Holy Spirit. We are NOT ALONE.

So just how do we share that love?

- in simple acts of love and caring to those around us. (*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6.2*)
- by sending messages of love and hope and inspiration to those who are isolated (*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. Hebrews 6.10*)
- by only buying what we need, for God promises to supply us with what we need (*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4.19*)
- by giving to organisations that can take our love and Christ's love further than we can ourselves. (In this **Christian Aid Week**, it could be by giving to Christian Aid to care for those who have so much less than we do here in the UK.) (*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6.2*)
- by prayer and intercession. Jesus promised – again (at the end of today's gospel reading) ***'I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'*** The fact that he repeats this emphasises the importance of this promise that he will answer our prayers. We can ask for ourselves and for others where we recognise need- and in this current situation we have been shown how much we are interdependent around our world.

May God bless you all as you seek to share his love with those you are in contact with and those who are beyond our physical contact. Amen