

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 16th May 2021, 7th Sunday of Easter

Reading: John 17:6-19

Last Saturday I watched the film Sully, it's about an American pilot called Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger who landed his stricken passenger plane on the Hudson River in New York in the winter of 2009 in order to save the lives of the passengers and crew. It was an amazing film, even though I'd seen the pictures on the news at the time and knew the ending, I still watched it! So why was that? There was no mystery! But I and people in their thousands have seen it and been enthralled by it.

Well, I think it can be a bit like that for us in the church – I don't expect us to land in a river and I certainly hope we won't sink – but we systematically follow a liturgical calendar that takes us through the life of Jesus and the early church. We know the ending, but it doesn't stop us repeating it. We recently travelled through Holy Week to the crucifixion and waited for the glorious resurrection at Easter. Just last Thursday we celebrated Ascension Day and we now find ourselves in the middle of what is usually called the Novena of Pentecost – the nine days that separate Ascension from Pentecost. This is the time when the disciples are waiting to see what is to happen next. We too are waiting; waiting with the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – the birthday of the church. But unlike them we know what happens, they waited without knowing, but we already know the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the church. More recently, these nine days of waiting have become the focus for a prayer initiative called "Thy Kingdom Come", when Christians across the world are encouraged to pray for five people who they would like to come to know Jesus. To that end, you can join myself and Eddie any time this week for Morning Prayer at 8:30 and Evening Prayer at 5pm live on Zoom to jointly pray for the growing of God's kingdom in the world.

But back to our gospel reading which takes us back to Holy Week, to Maundy Thursday to be exact. It is known as Jesus' High Priestly prayer, and it is recorded as being spoken by Jesus in the upper room following the Last Supper and before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane and his arrest. He begins, "Father the hour has come". He knows what is about to happen, his suffering and death. But he is looking beyond that to his resurrection then to his return to heaven, his Ascension. "So now Father, glorify me in your own presence." At the Ascension Jesus leaves behind the constraints of his earthly body and ascends to be with God the Father.

The disciples who witnessed the Ascension saw it as an ending as they would no longer have the physical presence of Jesus to guide them.

Jesus said that he had completed the work God sent him to do, so it was time to return to glory. Jesus is glorified, and glorifies the Father through his work. And then Jesus says something very interesting: "I am glorified in them." Jesus is going back to the Father and prays that His disciples left in the world would bring Him glory.

Of course, he is referring to the disciples who witnessed his ascension, but he also means all his disciples, including us! But how can we bring Him glory? The word "glory" in the Greek language literally means, "to give honour, praise and worship." We might think that giving God glory has to do mostly with what we do here in church – giving God some time on a Sunday morning to sing hymns (when we can), and say prayers and receive Holy

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Communion. While that is important, worship flows out of a life that is dedicated to glorifying God by doing the work that he has set out for us to do, just as Jesus brought glory to God by doing the work that the Father had given him to do.

We bring glory to God in the same way.

It may sound self-seeking to say “glorify me so that I can glorify you.” “Make me rich so that I can give to the Church!” “Make me really good, so that I can point to you!” but remember that when Jesus said that it is his time to be glorified, he was talking about the cross! The “work” that Jesus is about to complete is to die horribly on the cross and last thing that Jesus looks like as he goes to the cross is glorious. Those who have seen The Passion of The Christ would agree.

Maimed, hideous, tortured? Yes.

Glorious? No.

God’s way of measuring success in life is different to ours. Through his death on the cross Jesus completed the work given him by the Father, to show God’s love for humanity and to draw all people to God.

That was the work Jesus was given by the Father. What work have you been given? What is your calling? Are you listening to God, so that you can hear what he is asking you to do? In our reading from Acts we hear of Matthias, whose calling was to fill the gap left by Judas. It is easy to think that God is not calling you specifically, but be sure he is.

Your gifts and talents, can make a difference to the life of someone else through your words and deeds.

We are in the process of holding our APCMs at present, and there are positions of responsibility to be filled to ensure the continuation of all our churches. Think about your gifts and how you can use them for the good of the church and your community, and above all if nothing else, pray.

Pray for yourselves and each other, pray for those you would like to get to know Jesus and let the Holy Spirit do the rest!

Don’t just go your own way, travel God’s way – listen to his call, so that you can complete the work God has set for you and He can be glorified through all the things you do in his name

Amen.

Reverend Irene