

6th Sunday of Easter
Year C - 26/5/2019

Acts 16:9-15
Psalm 67
Revelation 21:10-14,21:22-22:5
John 14:23-29

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

On Thursday, when I preached to the mid-week Eucharist congregation I spoke about how we read John's Gospel throughout the Easter season; and how partly this was a practical thing - our 3 year cycle of readings needs to fit 4 Gospels into it, so the way in which this is done is by reading slabs of John's Gospel in the post-Easter season each year, as well as during Lent in one year and Advent in another year. But it is not only John's Gospel that is prominent in the post-Easter season. In fact, you may have noticed that each Sunday we have read from the same three books - the Acts of the Apostles, from John, and from the book of Revelation.

And whilst these three books of the Bible may appear to be incredibly different, even disparate, in fact when brought into conversation with each other, as we have been hearing over the past 5 weeks, there are some amazing insights to be gained. And together they serve to situate us firmly in God's time.

So, to the Acts of the Apostles. This is a book, written it is believed by the Evangelist Luke, the author of the third Gospel. It is set in the regions around Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome, and includes descriptions of early Christians departing on long missionary expeditions. It traces the history of the early church, especially its important figures of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and John.

It is particularly relevant to us as it includes today a description of the baptism of the household of Lydia, reinforcing for us the importance of baptism as the way in which people have long been received into the church. As a parish that holds a lot of baptisms, many for people who do not have a regular spiritual home, this is an

element that I always emphasise - the universal nature of God's Grace expressed through baptism.

Perhaps more obscure, at least at first glance, is the second reading, taken from the part of the Bible we know as the Book of Revelation. All the talk of gates, and angels, and tribes, and foundations may well have left you scratching your heads a bit. But you see Revelation is all about the culmination of God's promises.

And today's passage focuses on what is known as the New Jerusalem; at the point at which all of God's promises are manifest and complete we hear the marvelous promise: "And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever."

So, we have two readings - one from the Acts of the Apostles about the fledgling church and its origins, and one from Revelation about the end times. And these two readings are separated in distance and in time by a huge gulf. You might even say that they are poles apart.

And yet, we know two things for certain - firstly, that because God has made the promise described in Revelation, we know that God will be faithful and that gap will be bridged. And secondly - we know that this gap includes the time which we live now.

Think about it - we know where it is we came from, and we know how the early church and the Gospel it proclaimed literally exploded across the world from its beginnings in the Middle East. And we believe, in faith, that we know how the story will end - with the light of God flooding the earth and giving light and life and rest to all people and all creation.

But we have to live in the "in between", this time - 2019 - and this place. And in reality, our walk of faith is really all about how we live in this in between time, and seeks answers to the questions like "how do we live faithfully", "what do we believe", and "what does the Holy Spirit teach us about all this."

In other words, our third reading today, the one from John's Gospel, kind of brings it all together for us.

The context is clear. Jesus, as he speaks these words to his disciples, knows that his time and ministry in the world is almost over. And so he is preparing his disciples to be able to live in the world; in their own in between time, and helping them to answer those same questions with which we grapple even today.

And the way that Christians understand the inspiration of God to live faithfully is through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is known by many names in Scripture - the helper; the Paraclete (a Greek word meaning one who counsels, or aids, or stands beside); the Spirit of Truth; and today's word, the Advocate. Similarly, we understand the work of the Holy Spirit through various images - fire, wind, and dove being among the most common.

Jesus says to his disciples "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

So the Spirit teaches, the Spirit reminds us of God's words, and the Spirit brings God's peace - not peace as we narrowly understand it as just the absence of war or conflict, but a deep, abiding, peace - the sort of thing you understand in the very fibre of your being which feels like a sense of wholeness, even rightness. It's a sense of harmony with those persons and things around us.

And, paradoxically, this is a peace that can come even amid hardship, struggle, conflict, and disruption. Think, again, of the timing of Jesus' promise: it is the night of his betrayal, the evening when he will be handed over to those who hate him and who will take him away to be executed. And yet in that moment, he not only senses peace but gives it to others.

This peace is a gift of God, something we sense most keenly when we give over to God a certain amount of control of all the things that we worry about or normally cause us pressure.

Not that we surrender responsibility, but rather that we recognize there are limits to what we can affect or achieve on our own, and sensing those limits, we place ourselves, our loved ones, our fortunes, and our future in God's hands. And God's response is to give us peace, a peace that allows us to lift our gaze from the troubles that beset us and see those around us as gifts of God worthy of our love and attention.

In this time and age, the peace described by Jesus today is that most elusive thing, it seems - in so many different ways we struggle to find true peace in our lives. But it is that same Spirit to whom we cry today - for it is the Spirit who brings love, and peace, and protection, and wholeness - all of those things that we would wish for and pray for our lives and for the life of the world.

So today, in these in between times, we pray that we would know God's love for us, and that we would know God's peace in our lives - that peace which the world cannot give - that peace which passes all understanding.

The Lord be with you.