

## Easter 5 Year A 2023

### John 14.1-12

It may be that you were expecting, this morning, a sermon on the Coronation. I'm afraid this is not it, not least because liturgy is the best preacher. There is little to be added to the rite itself other than celebration, and we have our added celebrations at the end of this mass. It has been amusing knowing, through friends and colleagues, something of the inside story of the long preparations for the coronation service, not to mention the last-minute changes, though it did occur to me yesterday that the scriptural verse most obviously absent was Matthew chapter 5 verse 45 – *he maketh his sun to arise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust*. In July we will be welcoming the Precentor of Westminster Abbey, Fr Mark Birch, to preach at our patronal festival, and doubtless he will have plenty of tales to tell.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. Instead, they should believe, or trust, in him and in the Father. "There are many rooms in my Father's house", he assures them, and among these dwellings there will be a place for them which he will prepare, before returning to take them with him. This is, of course,

strange language. The challenge of obeying the command to trust is shown to us immediately in the questions which the disciples ask. “We don’t know where you are going”, Thomas says, “So how can we know the way?” There is a hint of exasperation in this question, it has the ring of “what on earth are you on about.” There is nothing unreasonable in this objection, indeed in chapter 16 the disciples will say to Jesus “Now you are speaking plainly,” presumably implying that he has been speaking far from plainly up until then.

Jesus answers Thomas robustly. “I am the Way, the truth and the life.” The life which is on offer to the disciples, the dwelling in the father’s house which is theirs to expect, is available through, with and because of Jesus. There is no other route. St Augustine expands on these words, explaining that what it means to have life, is to come to the truth, by means of the way. The union with God, with the ultimate truth, is ours by virtue of Christ and the new life of Easter into which we are baptised.

The words of our first hymn illuminate this teaching. Christ is the first fruits of those who have slept, the first to receive and to live the divine life which is the new creation of Easter and the triumph of the resurrection. And he will return to reap the harvest of the end time, when those who share in his resurrection shall be gathered into the divine life which is the truth of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But this

new life into which we are incorporated is not something which is a long way off, not a distant hope but a present reality. Christ is risen, we are risen – Christ first, and then those who belong to Christ. The writer - borrows the language of I Corinthians for the image of the first fruits, praying that the power of the resurrection which is the gift of Easter to us all, might manifest itself in the lives of all those who have received it. We are ripened by his glorious sunshine, enlightened by his countenance, that we might be fruitful on earth, and then gathered into glory when the end time is upon us.

The final verse of that hymn is a doxology, that is it offers glory to God, and explicitly to the Holy Trinity. We are drawn to the truth, that is to the ultimacy of the Godhead, by the way which is opened to us in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and on the journey of life which is breathed into us by the Spirit who is the Lord, the giver of life. It is no accident that after describing himself as “The Way, the Truth and the life”, Jesus will say that “He who has seen me has seen the Father, and do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” These verses, so central to the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, reveal to us the dynamic unity of the divine life into which we are drawn, the life where what it means to be divine is to be given perfectly to another in love.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. To trust in God and in the gift of the resurrection is not a matter of gambling with our souls, nor of presuming to think we are special. It is the conscious acknowledgement of the life of God at work in our lives and in our world, and to place ourselves within that life as the basis of all that we think or know or do. It is, as so often with the life of faith, a matter of letting God be God, of letting go of our self-concern and our anxieties for proof or security or wealth, and discovering that all these things are given to us in the life of God's people, the living as the body of Christ, which is ours in our day to day existence. In the wonderful words of the first letter of Peter *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."*