

## **20200519 - Sunday after Ascension**

Our virtual Coffee Mornings have been a great delight, not only because I get to see friends I have been missing, but also because it allows all of us to muse on what has changed over the last few weeks, and the blessings in that change; you are all so skilled in taking time to use this time, to re-evaluate and to reflect - I find this so encouraging as I look to my own future.

And this seems to be such an important fact to note: all our national and international news is about how difficult everything is, but those I speak to around us, are re-evaluating their current circumstances and seeking the positive out of this very challenging situation.

So frequently you might ask people how they are and there will be some acknowledgement that this-and-that might not be perfect, but then you will hear of the things that are great: family and church and various activities or work in the arts.

It seems that once the normal daily rushing died-down, there was then the time to look at other things, things we might not usually notice.

In our calendar we are in that strange time in-between Ascension and Pentecost. The scriptures from that time also illustrate that strangeness. Jesus had risen from the dead - but why? For what purpose? The disciples thought or assumed they knew: it was to restore the earthly kingdom to Israel, as our

Acts reading demonstrates. Can you imagine Our Lord's frustration when he heard this, although there is no record of it in the reading: had the one through whom the entire Universe was made, really gone through death and the resurrection just to sort out some political problem in a small country in the Middle East?

Pentecost of course changed all of that: now we know with the benefit of hindsight that Christ has come for everyone. The Spirit fell upon our forebears in the Faith and the world has never been the same since, indeed all of history has had to be re-written.

But the danger for us remains that we translate our own circumstances into something they are not, effectively missing-out on the opportunity to reflect. Apparently some Christians are speculating on the divine reasons for this pandemic. Fortunately most of us realise that such an attempt at analysis will most likely not produce much fruit for the Gospel. Some of our sisters and brothers are doing that now and in exactly the same way, the early Christians tried to do the same with Christ's Resurrection: for them everything had changed, but surely the reason everything changed was just so they could sort-out their age-old political issue with sovereignty. Perhaps the changes we are going through now, might similarly not have the result that everything just goes back to normal, but that something greater is brought out.

This was certainly the case for those early disciples. Everything really had changed and God's purpose as I mentioned, was revealed to be salvation for everyone, not just something small and restricted to one group of people, in

one place and at one time. This is how we are called to change our perspective as the Ascension takes place and now Pentecost approaches: Jesus is no longer to be consulted through His physical presence but now through a discipline of daily prayer and acts of service towards others; Yes he was in what we now call Palestine for three years physically, but now His Presence is available to all and any, no matter where they are or the time of day or indeed the day in history.

And so the early disciples were about to have a chance to understand the real reason for Christ's coming as a human being, a reason God had hinted at for centuries. Jesus was sticking to this purpose, this eternal purpose in God's dealings with humanity: our Gospel reading demonstrates this: What is our task, we may ask? "To know You, the only true God and the Christ You sent", and we are to be protected, so that what? So that we "may be one"; and how is this all to be accomplished? Through the Spirit coming upon those who believe, to transform our thinking into God's strategic vision for those He puts us amongst, as the Acts reading tells us.

And perhaps when everything is thrown-up in the air and we are forced to re-view matters, as we are now, we can get a chance to hear these messages again.

I have found this very important over these last few weeks. I was challenged to compare how my Christian walk is now, to how it was perhaps 10, 15 or more years ago. Some things have changed for the good but as always, "busy-ness" and the simple "doing" of a job, can be distracting. And so whilst

with the pandemic, the nature of the “job” has changed a bit for a short while, this new situation has been a tremendous opportunity to look at what really matters. And certainly ‘knowing God’ could not be more important. I always knew that of course, and I’ve talked about it often enough, but there is nothing like opportunity to lend itself to a cause.

As a result my prayer for us all is, let’s review our desires. I can’t imagine that this will be the ‘desire to see the restoration of the earthly political system’ as those early disciples were asking Jesus about. And so in our reviewing perhaps we can take time to talk to God about what He now wants our desires to be; desires for ourselves and His desire for our neighbours, for our friends, for our families. What does he want us to be yearning for, to be calling out to Him for day after day until he makes it happen? As a result with the coming of the Spirit, we can be transformed into ever-more effective instruments for His love, for His service and for His glory.