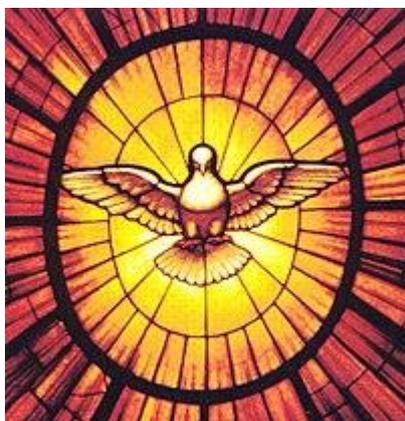


ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE – SUNDAY 17th MAY 2020

INTRODUCTION



In our Gospel today, Jesus promises his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Because I live", he says, "You also will live." What a wonderful promise! The very life which energised Jesus in His earthly ministry, and which burst from the tomb on the first Easter morning – that life is at work in you this morning, whether or not you are conscious of it right now.

At the beginning of this service, pause for a moment to collect your thoughts. Does God feel near, or far away? His promise is to be with us – forever! And we know He can be trusted to keep His promise.

REMINDING OURSELVES OF GOD'S PRESENCE

As we come to worship and praise

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come together in friendship,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come to listen and learn,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we bring all that is on our hearts and our minds,

Father God, we welcome you.

Father God, you are here now,

And we welcome you.

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

Loving God, you made us and you love us. We know that we have sometimes got things wrong. For the things we have said or done which have caused pain, and for the things we could have done to help others but didn't, forgive and heal us and them. Give us the strength to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, by the power of your Spirit. Amen.

A SONG

A new commandment I give unto you
That you love one another as I have loved you,
That you love one another as I have loved you.

*By this shall all men know you are My disciples
If you have love one for another (Repeat).*

GOSPEL READING (John 14:15-21)

Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION (by Revd Stephen Malkinson)

In my first parish back in the late 1960's, there was an old lady (actually she was only in her early 50s!) who suffered from severe arthritis and was wheelchair bound. She lived in a flat in a high rise building. and attended Church as often as she was able. One day she told us that she was feeling very low and how she felt completely useless. However, the one thing that we knew about her was that she always said her prayers morning and evening. A possible answer to her dilemma became apparent. Why not make her little flat a powerhouse of prayer? Each week we would ask her to pray for certain people and situations. When she did that it made a massive difference to us all. She now had a renewed sense of purpose and the parish was definitely enriched by knowing that we all were being upheld to almighty God every day by this lovely frail lady.

In today's gospel Jesus tells his disciples that although he is soon to leave he will not leave them as orphans, he will send another Advocate. To be an advocate means to come alongside someone and to be on their side. Sometimes God's Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, but it doesn't mean us resting on our laurels but rather to urge us on and encourage us. The Bayeux tapestry has a scene depicting King Harold with a spear pointing at the backside of one of his soldiers and written below is "Harold comforts his troops"!

He is not saying 'there, there' but urging



them on: 'you can do this'. So, the Holy Spirit not only comes alongside us but also urges us on especially at difficult times like these.

While we all are in this lockdown situation and are no longer free to come and go as we please, we can feel a sense of frustration, and even anger, which might lead us to feeling very low, especially as the long weeks go by. We can't even enter our church that always has been a source of great comfort and company for us all. Rather than us feeling pretty useless and frustrated, we can ask that Spirit to come alongside us and urge us on. We know that although for the time being our church building is closed, the church or family of St Stephen's is very much alive and active. We can recognise that God's Holy Spirit, his Comforter, will come alongside us and encourage us. It will give us the opportunity to re-visit our prayer life with the potential for our homes and hearts to become powerhouses of prayer.

We have so much to pray for. Every day we can pray for each other, our communities and uphold to almighty God all those for whom we are asked to pray each week. If we allow it, then God's Holy Spirit will give us a renewed sense of purpose, and turn the negatives into positives.

It may be some time before we are able to return to our beloved St Stephens church building, and I am sure that things will be different when that time comes. We will no doubt see changes in our future worship and fellowship, but what we do now in our relationships with almighty God and each other is to pray that we will become a church, or people of God, renewed both in community and vitality.

In times of difficulty such as these, a verse of a hymn that urges me on is:

'Come down O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing'.

HYMN FOR REFLECTION....

Come down, O Love divine!
seek thou this soul of mine
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

There let it freely burn
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat
consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my
path illuming.



And so the yearning strong
with which the soul will long
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace
till we become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

PRAYERS

As we gather in the company of the living God,
Let us pray.

Lord of life,
We pray that the Church may be alive with your risen life,
refreshed and revived by the breath of your Spirit,
purified and refined like gold and silver,
so that we truly offer the possibility
of saving love to a searching world.

Silence

You are the one true God:

And we worship you.

Lord of life,
We pray for the streets and neighbourhoods where we live.
May they be places where your truth
Is proclaimed daily by the way we live.
Help us to handle the everyday situations,
Through your leading.
May our words and actions
Speak of your faithful love
Your graciousness and your purity.

Silence

You are the one true God:

And we worship you.

Lord of life,
We pray for all who feel out of their depth,
All who are drowning in their pain, sorrow or guilt.
Set them free, O Lord, and save them,
Support them to a place of safety
And fix their feet on the bedrock of your love.

Silence

You are the one true God:

And we worship you.

Lord of life,
we pray for those who have died
and now see you as you really are.
You have promised never to leave us,
And so we commend them to your keeping for ever.

Silence

You are the one true God:

And we worship you.

Lord of life,
Your love for us is so great
And our love for you so small.
Thank you for accepting what we are able to offer
And ignite in us a blaze of love.

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers

For the sake of your Son,

Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer (this version, or the traditional one)

Rejoicing in God's new creation, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father, you are in heaven
and your name is special and wonderful.
May your plans become reality,
and all you desire happen in our world and in yours.
Please give us all we need to get through today.
Forgive us for all we have got wrong,
and help us to do the same for those who hurt us.
Keep us from doing things that are wrong,
and protect us in these hard times.
Everything in heaven and on earth is made by you and belongs to you,
and that's the way it will be Always. Amen**

ENDING

**Though we are apart,
and living through times of great uncertainty,
be with us Lord, to comfort and guide us,
today and for ever.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.**

