

## SERMON for Easter 5 – May 10, 2020.

Readings: Acts 7: 55-60; Psalm 31: 1-5, 17-18; 1 Peter 2: 11-25; John 14: 1-14.

Suggested hymns:

|         |                                 |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| TIS 246 | Christ is the world's light     |
| TIS 552 | Come my way, my truth, my life  |
| TIS 226 | Thou art the way, by thee alone |
| TIS 183 | Sing of the Lord's goodness     |

Revd Sue Lodge Calvert begins her weekly reflection on the readings:

The good news as the gospel of John outlines it is that we have a way, a spiritual path, on which we can travel through life further and further into the heart of God and our true home, our true nature, our true purpose. But the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus does not save Stephen from martyrdom (Acts 7:55-60) nor us from the slings and arrows of human experience. We are still in the Easter season and supposedly unpacking what it means to be a resurrection people – which sounds very uplifting and positive - and yet here we are being asked to think about martyrdom and suffering and for comfort and wisdom we are directed to the gospel reading we so closely associate with funerals and final homes! <sup>1</sup>

The significance of the reading from the Acts of the Apostles this week is almost lost in the shadow of the Gospel reading, and yet on reading it we discover we have entered the story near the end. It is the story of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and his final witness. And hidden away in this story, nearly lost in its significance, is the mention of 'a young man named Saul' [v58b]. This young man would also change the world with his witness. After a time of ruthlessly persecuting followers of the Way, he would, on the way to persecute those who had fled to Damascus, discover that he had got it all wrong! His Damascus road conversion would not only change him, change his name to Paul, but would change the world, as the Gentile world was opened to the Good News of the Gospel.

Nearly missed that one!

I often think of life as a journey, a journey we will all make from 'cradle to grave' however long or varied that may be. As we continue to live under the strange times Covid 19 has forced on us, now more than ever, I believe, we need a map to guide us as we journey through life.

I don't know about you, but for me there has always been something about maps and atlases which have fascinated me. Whenever there is something on the news or a programme about some place, or I am reading a good book, out comes the atlas or Google Earth and I will look it up. I find there is something about maps, that once I start looking at them, I end up spending more time looking and looking, then looking something else up ... and on I go!

Maps are important; you need them so that you know where you are going, or how to get to your destination.

I always remember a friend of mine saying to me some years ago, as he was leaving, that his prayer for me was to find a road map! At the time, I wasn't quite sure how to take that!

We are all on our life's journey, and we all need direction, we need some idea of where we are going, and how we are going to get there.

Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

In other words, use as your road map Jesus' life, his teaching, his ministry, and his relationship with God and those around him. But before I get too carried away in idealistic

dreams, let us ground what we have just heard in the gospel reading. Ground it in its original context.

The scene is the Last Supper ...

Jesus is speaking to his closest followers in private as they faced the uncertainty of life without him around. They are not sure if they've got what it takes to continue in the way he has shown them. Peter thinks he probably does, but in the verse immediately before we picked up the story, Jesus has just told him that within hours Peter will be pretending he's never even heard of him.

When John writes these words down, he is writing for a Christian community which has been forced out of their spiritual home within Judaism, and are under increasing pressure, sometimes even on pain of death, as we heard in the reading from Acts, to give up the distinctive claims of their faith and conform with the religious norms of their day. In the midst of that, Jesus' words are addressing questions of Christian identity; of what it means to be followers of Jesus. <sup>2</sup>

Jesus reassures this homeless, frightened Community and us, "Let not your hearts be troubled ... In my Father's house are many rooms". Jesus asks for our faith and tells us not to worry. Ultimately, these homeless believers will find an eternal dwelling place in God.

Philip, in his anxiety, says to Jesus, "Lord, show us God, and we will be satisfied." Jesus response to that is that if you have seen him, you have already encountered God.

Today, a spiritually-hungry, spiritually confused and spiritually homeless world says to the Church, "Show us God." The mission of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is to be a place of encounter with God.

Canadian writer, Douglas Coupland, claims that Generation X is the first generation raised without religion. In his book, *Life After God*, Coupland's sometimes funny book details the materialism, cynicism, alienation, and meaninglessness in the lives of several Gen-Xr's. At the end of the text is a shocking confession that lays bare the spiritual hunger and spiritual homelessness in our world today:

Now -- here is my secret: I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God -- that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love. (p. 359).

Does that sound familiar to you? It does for me, particularly in these confusing times when our 'normal' way of being has been so disrupted.

As we bask in the glow of the resurrection during these Sundays of Easter, it is good for us to reflect on our mission as the People of God. We believe that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." I believe this a positive assertion about the person of Christ and not criteria for excluding others. How can we, as the People of God, respond to the request, "Show us God"?" <sup>3</sup>

How do we witness to our faith and live our lives in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, a society which has definitely changed from the society we grew up in and more particularly, now as the world reels from a pandemic?

Our journey of faith was intended to be carried out in community with other followers, as much as humankind was designed to be creatures that lived in relationship with others - in love, compassion and hope with faith.

An e-friend of mine once wrote:

“... it is to us, as we wrestle with how to live as people of love and faith and peace and justice in the world we find ourselves in, that Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. None of you comes to the Father except through me." He did not address these words to the Hindus or the Muslims or even to those Jews who did not believe in him.

He addressed them to those of us who were already his followers and who were anxious and uncertain about the way forward. "I am the way. Follow me."

He addressed them to those of us who were already his followers and who were not sure what to believe. "I am the truth. Believe in me."

He addressed them to those of us who were already his followers and who were fearful for the future. "I am the life. Live in union with me.""<sup>2</sup>

Good people, people of faith and who have been prayed for by many have died from the pandemic and sadly more yet will die. Just as good people, people of faith who have been much prayed for have and will die of cancer and traffic accidents. Faith does not protect us from the fully ordinary human experience of joy, pain, fear, suffering and death. And yet we are told that in our relationship with Jesus we are invited into a living way, onto a spiritual path, which will lead us deeper and deeper into the heart of God and that will carry us closer and closer to our true home and destination.<sup>1</sup>

Now is the time, more than ever, we need Jesus as our map for life, so that through our witness, we can show a confused and hurting world, God.

Revd Sally Buckley  
10<sup>th</sup> May, 2020.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Revd Sue Lodge Calvert from her sermon/reflection *The Way* as posted on her website [companionsontheway.com](http://companionsontheway.com) May 6, 2020.
2. Nathan Nettleton; his draft sermon posted on *preachingtheword* in 2002.
3. Mark Friesland; his comments posted on *gospeltalk*