

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 25 May 2025 - The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Lectinary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Acts 16.9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21.10, 22-22.5; John 14.23-29 **Acts must be read**

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Canon Dr Robert Mackley, Incumbent - Vicar, St Mary the Less, Cambridge

"If you loved me..." We might suspect parents of teenagers get bored of hearing this phrase! "If you loved me, you'd let me go to that party", "If you loved me, you'd let me stay up late, go to the pub, have a sleepover, buy me some trainers to replace the essential trainers I simply had to have a few months ago not to be the laughing stock of my friends, etc, etc."

We can use that phrase as a means of blackmail, emotional or otherwise not just as annoying teenagers but in our friendships and relationships. Sometimes we know we're blackmailing, sometimes we don't. 'If you loved me...'

Jesus this morning says the same to his disciples – "If you loved me," "If you loved me," he says, "you would rejoice that I am going to the Father."

He says these things at the Last Supper, a matter of hours before he is betrayed, arrested, tortured, and murdered. Today's Gospel passage occurs on the night before the crucifixion. He has told them this is about to happen and therefore is probably not surprised that the disciples are more than a trifle upset. No wonder he responds, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." He is reassuring them in anticipation of the awful events that are about to take him away from them.

But we hear this gospel on the Sunday before the Ascension of Jesus, the feast which we keep on Thursday. Jesus's Ascension to heaven, his return to his Father, to the glory he had before the world began, this is also a going away from the disciples.

Two departures, then: to the crucifixion, and to heaven. Two goings away. "And" says, Jesus, "if you loved me, this would make you rejoice."

One would imagine that by now the disciples are used to the curious paradoxes and mysterious statements of Jesus, yet this one must have taken the biscuit. How can the departure of the one they love, for whom they have given up everything and around whom as much of their lives revolve as they can manage, how can his departure be a cause of rejoicing?

Well, it would if we loved him, Jesus tells us. But what does it mean to love him? We think of love as feelings, as ecstasies, as that warm glow. And it certainly can involve those things

and it's jolly nice when it does. But Jesus is quite clear what it means to love him: it means to keep his word. In other words, to allow all that he has said and done in the three years the disciples have known him, to abide, to dwell within them, so that these words and deeds will shape and transform their lives.

And if they had done that, if we do that, then we would understand what Jesus was about and we would know him. Jesus said that he and the enigmatic source he called 'his Father' would come and dwell with us as well. And the crucifixion and the ascension would cease to be matters of terror and weeping and become sources of joy and peace, because we would see things from his point of view, from his eyes.

People can get very excited by what they see. 'Look at that! Isn't it astonishing?' someone might say. Yet it is only going to be when we can see it too, when we are looking where they are looking and standing where they are standing. Otherwise, our response is like the disciples' response: 'Eh? What? I can't see anything.'

To see the Crucifixion and the Ascension as occasions for joy, we need to keep Jesus' word, and so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the paraclete (literally, in the Greek, the one who comes alongside) will dwell in us with his Father. This, as Jesus says elsewhere, enables us to do the works he does, and share his life.

We rejoice at the Ascension because Jesus is returning to the Father. He is returning to unveiled, unhidden glory (to something greater than the limitations of being incarnate, hence the phrase this morning 'the Father is greater than I') and that's cheering in itself. But he also returns this time carrying flesh with him. He returns to the Father in a body. He takes our flesh, our humanity, into the heart of God as well. By the incarnation he has made his home in us, that we might find our true home with him in the unadulterated ecstatic glory of God's own life. This is indeed a matter for rejoicing.

But can we really rejoice at the Crucifixion and the suffering and agonising death of another human being, especially one we have come in some sense to love? No, that can never be joyful. Mary and St John, and the women who stood at the foot of the cross, were not rejoicing. That cannot be what Jesus meant.

Yet we can rejoice in other ways. We can rejoice in Jesus' fidelity to the Father's love. He was willing out of love for the world to even go to his death. We can be thankful for what he has done. We can rejoice that it is not we who have to bear the burden of rejection and hatred and sin, at least not to the degree that Jesus did. We can rejoice that he has gone before us. And we can rejoice that in taking on and defeating all the violence of a fallen world, and death, he has opened to us a new way, the way to the Father, to the source of all life and love. He did not come back with violence to the violence he faced. He did not respond with a tit-for-tat. Instead he brought peace, the peace that the world cannot give. We can and we must rejoice at that.

Jesus says: I am going away and I am coming to you. He goes away to the Cross that he may come back on the other side of death with gleaming wounds and the gift of a peace that nothing can take away. He goes away, he ascends to the Father, that he may come back in the power of the Holy Spirit, no longer in one time and one place but available in all times and all places. And the astonishing thing is, he comes to us now, whenever we pray, whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, whenever we read the scriptures. He and the

Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, come to dwell in us, that we may indeed keep his word, so that we may love him and so rejoice in the peace which passes all understanding and which will carry us through not just the coming week, but even through death, to the life that has no end. Then, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we will live and love for ever and ever. Amen.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

In union with Jesus Christ our great high priest, and longing for the coming of the Spirit, the Comforter, let us pray to our Father:

Father, your Son will go away from us that you might send us his Holy Spirit. Help Dagmar our acting Bishop and all your church grow into the full stature of Jesus Christ that we might not be afraid but rejoice that he returns to you, carrying our humanity.

Lord, hear us

All Lord graciously hear us

Father, your Son gives us peace but not as the world tries to give it. Bless Charles our King and all in authority in every nation that they may seek after the peace of Jesus Christ and not the peace of the mere truce, the peace of the defeated in battle, the peace of the silenced poor.

Lord, hear us

All Lord graciously hear us

Father, you have promised with your Son to come and abide with us. Hear us as we pray for all those who are alone, all who are lonely, all who feel abandoned in this world. May they discover a rich fellowship and friendship in you.

Lord, hear us

All Lord graciously hear us

Father, your Son says to us: 'Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let us be afraid.' Hear us as we pray for those who are sick or in any kind of distress. Through our prayer,

through medicine and through our friendship may their hearts be lightened. Among those who are in need we pray for...

Lord, hear us

All Lord graciously hear us

Father, your Son has said to us that we should rejoice because he is coming to you. Enfold in his arms all those who have died in hope of the resurrection, and all the dead whose faith you alone know. Give them joy in your presence and give us joy as we trust that they are in your nearer presence. We remember especially...

Lord, hear us

All Lord graciously hear us

Rejoicing in our fellowship with all to whom the Spirit has been promised, and looking with Mary and the apostles for the coming of that Spirit, we commend all things to God's gracious keeping as we pray: **Merciful Father...**

Suggested hymns/songs

From the *Celebration Hymnal* for everyone:

8 Abba Father send your Spirit

399 Love is his word, love is his way

734 This is what Yahweh asks of you

754 Unless a grain of wheat

818 Ye choirs of new Jerusalem

From the *New English Hymnal*:

112 Jesus lives! Thy terrors now

114 Now is eternal life

115 Now the green blade riseth

351 Come, ye faithful, raise the anthem

490 Judge eternal, throned in splendour

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources

- [engageworship](#) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)