

Sunday May 22, 2022 – (Rogation Sunday) Home Team - Mat Lester

I am going to start my talk today by reading the second Gospel set for today, which I will be referring to in the course of the talk

John 14:23-29

Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

‘I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate,[a] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

During our presentation about graffiti on the walls of this church last Saturday evening we learnt that perhaps 500 years, the priest or villagers might have walked in – by the South door, down the steps from their houses and touched the words on the column, still showing signs of wear now ‘Miserere Mei Deus – God have mercy on us’. I can see how that physical contact with the words really helped in connecting them to their faith in God, in far from settled times.

I find Jesus leaps out of the page in today's readings; in John 14. His words are so powerful and tangible; He says to his disciples at the last supper before he departs them.

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'

Before this he says *'the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you'*.

The Rural Advisor to the diocese the Revd Janet Nicholls tells us that 'In [this] our reading from John's gospel, Jesus makes it clear that God's peace is his gift and his legacy. It's a holy peace with a depth unknown in the secular world and yet it's a peace that stills our hearts and minds enabling us to live fully in this world

Rooted in Christ and with God's peace in our hearts, we might open our eyes afresh to the world around us this Rogation Sunday.'

So - Rogation – The church of England Common Prayer reminds us that the word rogation comes from the Latin 'to ask for', The Prayer book Gospel includes the words of Jesus,

'Whatever ye shall ask for in my Name, he will give it you' – words associated with the heavenly intercession of the ascended Christ.

Ancient pre-Christian festivals included processions to invoke divine favour to protect crops. These have continued with Christian communities asking for Gods blessing on the land and in preserving boundaries, encouraging fellowship and of giving to the poor often with outdoor worship.

As we feel the Spring all around us; birds and wildflowers in the churchyard, crops in the fields, woodlands in full leaf – trees putting down deep roots for nourishment; let us now feel God’s presence and the nourishment both physical and spiritual that he provides us and accept that blessing.

The reading from Acts today places us firmly in the midst of the disciples in their mission. They have been listening to the Holy Spirit and Paul has just been guided into Europe – through Macedonia. The details and location might help us feel closer to the action; specific, telling us where and when and indeed whom.

Perhaps also important for today’s observance is the river they go to; which we’re told is a place of prayer. A believer of God is there already, perhaps feeling that connection with Him through nature of that place.

The peace of a river, even in our village, the bubbling water under a bright green canopy ,can certainly help us to find the peace and love that God provides. Next time you are beside water, perhaps a lake, river or estuary in the early morning, pause a while –

listening to the birds, the reeds – and God.

Let’s also take note that this place of rural prayer where the disciples had headed, away from the bustle of the city of Philippi had found a woman who felt that closeness to God, and who listened to the words of Jesus and brought the people she led to Baptism and persuaded the disciples to bless her by staying with her. A blessing for them too perhaps and an inspiration for us.

The Revd Janet Nicholls continues by saying ‘draw close to God in the blessings of [this] Rogationtide;

take in the goodness of nature; simply rest in God’s peace for a while.

As we observe the delights and the challenges before us, the words of Psalm 67 [which Barbara read at the beginning of this worship] would seem to offer that perfect Rogation blessing, ‘

May God be merciful to us and bless us,

show us the light of his countenance and come to us.

Let your ways be known upon the earth,

your saving health among all nations.

Amen’

Mat Lester