

## **EASTER 6: 2023**

Our readings this morning are beautifully matched. In St Paul's famous passage to the Athenians his oratory skill captures his very mixed audience. He is teaching them that God cannot be confined or live in great monuments and shrines of human making but instead is knowable as a mother loves her son or a father his daughter. We are God's offspring, literally, so much so that "in him we live and move and have our being". He both cherishes us and redeems us when we let go of our selfish desires and instead choose his call to follow and live in the light of the Resurrection. All that is needed, as our Gospel reading affirms, is to follow the ways of love which we have been taught and to abide in Him.

There is no place for fear (which undoubtedly the first apostles must have faced) because we will be well equipped and served by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This reading and sentiment fits so well with our liturgical year as we draw close to Ascension Day this coming Thursday and then just a little later the great day of Pentecost to put some fire back into our faith, some passion even, or even new directions. It isn't the physical presence of the Risen Lord which we have so much as the spiritual presence of Him who is still very much alive in us – through our sacramental worship, our prayer, our living in community together as Christian brothers and sisters, as one big family. There are no orphans or strangers in this family because all are united around The Saviour who died for us and rose again. The gift of this shared faith must always be passed around and passed on. And I think it would be great if both churches in our young Benefice could explore more public ways about teaching what matters most to us and inviting others in to that conversation.

We may be too quick to 'put down' all the ALPHA groups that have sprung up across the Church of England because their style and content may be different from ours. But if that is the case, we need

an alternative approach, an alternative 'Alpha' that also has food involved, different homes involved, different age groups involved – asking the question 'Why?' or 'How?' – not so unlike the questions St Thomas dared to ask when the risen Christ was standing right beside him, in front of him, behind him. If we are passionate about our faith we must share that with others, especially those enquiring for the first time or even the second time.

But, yes, our 'answers' may be many and varied. Those of you who have a long experience of working with other churches, will know first-hand, the frustration of working through our differences or perhaps I mean instead, **living** with our differences. But wherever we stand, we still need the Lord's presence and His Spirit of love, friendship and companionship.

I thought that again only yesterday afternoon in Grove Court, when I anointed a 100 year old woman I never knew. She couldn't speak but she could hear my voice and the prayers we shared. God's presence was very real to both of us in that special sacramental moment which doesn't distinguish between the sick and the healthy as much as between faith and no faith. We both knew that life and death are two sides of the same God-given crown, or jewel, or coin. As St Augustine famously extolled, "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our Song." Or as our Risen Lord made flesh: "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End."

So it is a wonderful thing, is it not, that we can see, hear and know God is in our midst? God is not 'up there' somewhere or, 'unknowable', 'unfathomable'. Instead we choose to form our living bond to a living God who very much wants us to journey and explore our faith with him, and even sometimes 'without words' - as in the closest of all our strongest and most binding relationships.

Talking of which, I saw my Mum in Eastbourne over the bank holiday and took her out for a very late birthday lunch at her favourite

Italian...not **with** her favourite Italian! Anyway, something we invented together since I was a child, was a whole series of strange sounding exchanges, phrases which we often showed off in public, like: “hawaia..inchawar”, “oosanger...meepow-pow” ...but it was all gobbledy-gook! We never advanced or improved our understanding of this fake language, but we did enjoy and ‘milk’ the moment, the silliness of it all.

Now I am not suggesting we should have a relationship like that with the God who made us; I am suggesting though that our journey with God should be as open and honest and enjoyable as it possibly can be in this life because, like the very best parent, God wants us to flourish, to use our gifts, to take part as fully as we can in our life at St Mary’s.

I really hope you will come along to our Annual meetings tomorrow night, not for high excitement so much, but just to rest content that we do belong together through faith! We do have hopes for the future and yes, that God’s kingdom here does need to grow. Surely, together, we very much need to keep alive the rumour that **God** is alive, and ever present for us and His created world, and for all eternity. Alleluia!

Amen.