



Sunday 13 May 2018 – Sunday after the Ascension
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Acts 1: 15-17 & 21-end Gospel of St John 17: 6-19
Focusing on Ascension, Liberation & the Assisted Dying Debate
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

“Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth.”

In the Gospel Jesus prays these words openly to his Father foretelling succinctly the importance of his forthcoming death, resurrection and ascension. He's speaking openly so that his disciples can hear but he knows that they will not grasp the significance of what he is saying, until after his ascension.

In Acts, it is that larger than life disciple Peter, who first articulates clearly the significance of Jesus' words. Peter grasps two things immediately: 1st that the Ascension is not an ending of Jesus' ministry but rather a continuity of ministry in heaven; and 2nd that it will be vital for those remaining in God's earthly kingdom to pass on to succeeding generations, a faithful witness to that ministry in the light of the resurrection and ascension.

After all, if the resurrection and ascension had not happened why are we here this morning? Jesus was so much more than just a good man who died. Through his divinity, his resurrection and ascension, he provides the gateway to life in all its eternal fullness. By leaving this earth in our flesh he enables us to be drawn to his Father in heaven. By Jesus conquering death Christians have something worth proclaiming and sharing with those who do not yet know the love of God through Jesus Christ. In his earthly life, by example, he laid the foundations for us to continue his mission building his kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven. The question is, how confident do we feel about doing that?

I return to my opening words, quoting Jesus:

“Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth.”

His prayer asks that we will be inspired with divine insight to sustain the integrity of our witness, to be protected by the truth of his Word. And that is so important when, as Christians, we are pulled in different directions by public opinion. Never more so than in recent weeks with the debate on assisted dying. People on both sides quote those of faith or of none, in support of their argument. How do we discern what has integrity for our faith? What I say next may not be a view shared by you all and I respect that. I don't seek to impose my views on you. It would, however, lack integrity if I was to hide my own thoughts. I offer them as a point to ponder.

Personally, I believe God gave me life and that it will be his decision when my earthly life ceases and he gathers me to him. As his disciples, Jesus calls us to take up our

cross and follow him and part of that is physical death. I do not relish the process of dying but I do know that for those who realise their end is approaching and those who grieve for them, it can be a time of healing. Not of the body but more importantly of the mind discerning spiritual truths. It can be a time of forgiveness, reconciliation and wholeness, which is a great blessing despite the pain that is endured.

It is a time when all that seemed to matter so much in the fulness of life ceases to have relevance. The confident, polite front we present to the world. The concerns of having sufficient means on which to live. All these transient things cease to have value or, as St Paul says, the temporal things pass away but spiritual things are eternal. It is those eternal gifts in which we need to invest now for the future.

I don't say this glibly but with the benefit of personal experience of witnessing both of my parents severe physical suffering in their last months and days mercifully, managed by excellent palliative care. Many of you may have witnessed similar with your loved ones. It is so hard to observe and yet supporting my parents though that time gave them the opportunity to lay aside all former daily concerns. No longer need they be parents with responsibility but together, we were pilgrims in faith.

My mother, in particular, had suffered a distressing life-long psychiatric condition. Yet in the final 10 days of her life she was completely rational. In tending her, I had the blessing of talking with her and hearing her loving thoughts for me, woven together with words of faith and biblical quotes. Her mind was healed and made whole in Christ. For me, it had been worth waiting 55 years to hear and share that healing wholeness but above all, to learn the gift of compassion. How much we both could have lost if assisted dying had been made available.

Although, an amendment is proposed to modify the assisted dying proposals, the debate has served to highlight that people are confused about what is right. By sharing my thoughts, I do not intend to divide opinion between us but seek to celebrate the God we share in common and pray that we will be gracious with each other where we differ. It is in that light of loving togetherness that will be the ethos for the Prayer Vigil to be held here in church on Tuesday evening I also seek to serve those who have no faith who perceive that there is nothing beyond the grave.

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that we are in the world but not of it. Our permanent home is in heaven. For now, however, we are called to build his kingdom; to share our faith with the faithless; to give hope to the hopeless; to give liberation to those bowed down by the worries of the world; to give security to the vulnerable; to place their hands in the hands of Christ, so that they may receive his loving forgiveness and so find sanctity in life and feel his freedom.

We have a gospel to proclaim. Let us live our lives in the joy of that truth and so be the Good News, which is risen, ascended, glorified!"

Amen.