



clear that they made not only Christianity but the whole of world history ever since. This, the concluding sermon, is ambitiously titled “Tying it all together.” That is not only impossible in a short sermon, - it is just plain impossible. We can never tie up Christianity into a neat bundle – a handy summary. And even if we tried it would be out of date in seconds for Christianity is organic and there is always something new to discover. I hope that in the last few weeks you have been able to discover that new thing, or shed new light on an old truth as you looked again at these five momentous events, and as Simon said in last week’s sermon found yourselves “better understanding God and better able to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit within us and within the world - because our God is a God of surprises.” The events, birth, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, have shaped the faith of Christians for 2,000 years and still impact on the lives of two billion people today – and through them, the rest of the world. They help us to understand Jesus and ourselves, but to do that we need to internalise the truths we have learnt from them. To better do that, our author, John Pritchard, suggests that we look at these events as two biographies, a biography of Love and a biography of faith; this also continues the pattern we have followed each week of looking first at what it means and then what it means for us.

### **The Biography of Love**

This is the story told from God’s point of view beginning with the love shown in the incarnation. Love is creative by nature – a couple in love create a home, a lover of plants creates a garden. God so loved the world that he had made – and still makes - that he sent his son to save it. It was his way of communicating his love to humankind – sending his son to become part of humanity.

That love was then shown in the life and death of Jesus – and his message of the coming of the kingdom. With the kingdom would come God’s reign of Love, when justice, peace and love would be intertwined. But at the time, not everyone who heard it could cope with the message and the light it shed and - and so they nailed that Love to a cross.

But they failed to kill it. The Resurrection showed that love is indestructible. Love this strong could not be killed off. Love has come again and destroyed those very forces of destruction which sought to destroy it.

With the Ascension that love exploded and was let loose across the world. Jesus was exalted, restored to his rightful place, but not before he handed on his commission leaving the disciples ready for the task ahead.

Only one thing was still missing for that task and that came at Pentecost. God’s answer was to make that Love available within the life of every believer. God’s transformational love had come into a world deeply in need of the change it would bring.

So, we, as today’s Christians are part of that 5<sup>th</sup> Event – a continuing Pentecost as we continue the work begun that day. This is not sentimental love; it is strong and muscular.

We recapitulate it at each Eucharist and reclaim its power as our story is absorbed into God’s great story. We can continue to write this great biography of love for the world; as we prepare for a new chapter – Event 6 perhaps - when Christ returns and God’s love will once again explode across creation and embrace us all in its fullness.

### **The Biography of Faith**

The other biography is told from our point of view. Pritchard says that these five events are echoed in our own lives as we go on our journey of faith. Or, as Paul says in our reading, as we fight the good fight of faith.

First there is a birth, the birth of faith. However we originally came to faith and however mature we are as Christians, there was a time when that baby arrived and faith was born in our lives. But every baby needs to grow and develop

Later may have come a sort of death, a crisis of faith. There will be times when we struggle as Christians, when the message becomes obscured, and we find ourselves going through a dry period. Then it may seem that faith has died. There is no shame in that; it is a common experience. But by the grace of God, we get through it and faith survives.

And then we experience our own form of resurrection as we find a new life in faith. That crisis may be a sea-change in our own biography of faith. Faith becomes more nuanced and mature as we pass through the black/white, yes/no certainties to a faith which is perhaps less naïve, less definite and clear cut, but which is actually more deep-rooted. It is now so deeply engrained in our nature that we find we are indeed resurrected – liberated to explore our faith in new and more adventurous ways.

And, as with the ascension, the rightful order was restored as Jesus ascended his throne in heaven, so our faith now finds its true place in our lives. In this phase of our personal biography, faith has become a settled part of our lives. It has become a clear priority but also feels natural. Just as in romance, high passion gives way to an enduring love which becomes a deep, entwining part of our lives, we find that our faith is now a quiet assurance that God is God. And we can be ourselves and relax with him, like the old friend he is.

We are now ready for our individual Pentecost. Earlier on our faith journey, just like a child, we may have been rather self-absorbed. But with maturity comes the discovery of how central faith is in our lives, and that sets us free and empowers us for action. We acknowledge the love that has flowed into our lives and know that that must inevitably be passed on to others. God's love is not something to hug selfishly to ourselves; we must allow it to flow in and through us. So we will find we are drawn into works of compassion, actions that help to build the kingdom. This stage will take up the whole of the rest of our lives.

This is the pattern, Pritchard suggests, that the Christian life **may** follow. But every person's biography of faith will be different. We won't necessarily all progress through these same stages in the same order and some of us may not experience them at all or in the same way. Not everyone will have a crisis of faith but most of us will probably admit to times when we went through a period of what Pritchard calls "complexity" in our faith. But these five events in our biographies are indicative of our faith journey and the stage we are at. And we should not be discouraged if sometimes we have to go through the same experience more than once before God is through with us. It is the journey which is important and, above all, we must not stand still and get stuck, allowing our faith to stagnate so that we leave no room for the intervention of God's grace.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen the five events that have shaped and made sense of the Christian story. But also, we have seen how these five events are part of our story and make sense of our lives. Once we have understood that biography of God's love, we can embark on our own biography of faith. And if we do so, we will find we are being changed, infinitely slowly, perhaps so slowly we may not even notice, into the likeness of Christ. We must faithfully continue to write that biography – and trust God to supply the ending.

Amen

## **Prayers**

### **Today's Collect**

Lord of all power and might,  
the author and giver of all good things:  
graft in our hearts the love of your name,  
increase in us true religion,  
nourish us with all goodness,  
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

### **A Prayer for true religion**

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1:27: 27

God, help us to be a people that are concerned about the oppressed and weak, the neglected and downtrodden. Please use your church to reach those that you love, but so many reject. Help us reconsider our notions of success, glorifying your name in light of your heart for the neglected? Help us to be content with unseen faith that works in serving the unnoticed. Help us live in ways that reflect your pleasure in us, and your pleasure in those that are hurting. Help our faith in you not merely be evident when life is convenient and tidy but also when we enter the chaos of others' pain. May we remember that Jesus did not come to seek accolades but to serve us, those that could not pay Him back. He was the one who practiced true religion. Help us both to follow in his path and make him a model for our lives and so in our obedience please you. Amen

*Adapted from Agape, Chicago*

### **Prayers for relief from the Pandemic**

#### **For the most vulnerable**

Father God, we pray that you would protect those in our world who are most vulnerable to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). We lift up the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions and those without access to good medical care. We pray they would know your peace, comfort and protection. Father, would you bring healing to those who are already sick. We pray particularly for countries in our world who have fewer resources and less infrastructure to respond to the Coronavirus. Lord God, in your might and power would you stop the virus from spreading in some of the most vulnerable communities in our world. Give governments great wisdom as they put in preventative measures. We pray for any cases to be identified and isolated quickly that healing may swiftly follow. In Jesus name, Amen

#### **For our Leaders**

Father God, we pray for great wisdom for our government and health advisers. Lord God, please guide their decisions and help them to communicate plans clearly. We pray that they would make decisions which would quickly and effectively stop the spread of the

Coronavirus. Sustain our leaders and grant them energy during a time where they will be working long hours under great stress and strain. In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

**Blessing**

Go forth into the world in peace;  
Be of good courage;  
Hold fast that which is good;  
Render to no one evil for evil;  
Strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;  
Help the afflicted; honour everyone;  
Love and serve the Lord,  
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen