

## Living the Word

### 1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18

In common with most, if not all of the early Christians, Paul expected the second coming of Christ to happen soon. Here he consoles the Thessalonians who are worried about the fate of their loved ones before the return of the Lord. He tells them they are with the risen Jesus and that the living and the dead will be reunited in the final revelation of the kingdom. The Thessalonians are facing what we all experience, the loss of a loved one. Grief is never straightforward. Paul's message to them and to us is clear. He doesn't tell them and us NOT to grieve. That is alright and normal in such circumstances. What he states unequivocally is 'Do not grieve like those who have no hope. Our confidence rests in Jesus who has conquered death on the Cross and is alive through the Resurrection. There lies our true hope now and for the future. Following Paul's pastoral advice to the Thessalonians: 'We are to comfort one another with these thoughts.'

#### O Sing unto the Lord

It has sometimes been said that the Church of England receives her theology from her hymns, and thus it is unsurprising that some of our great hymns have been a long-standing source of controversy. *O valiant hearts, who to your glory came* was written in 1917 by Sir John Stanhope Arkwright (1872-1954) and sung at a service in Westminster Abbey on the 5th August 1917 to mark the third anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. Titled *The Supreme Sacrifice* the words were widely printed in newspapers and soon became exceedingly popular, particularly when accompanied by the wonderfully sentimental tune by Charles Harris (1865-1936), rector of Colwall, Herefordshire. It was sung at the burial service of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey on the 11th November 1920, on that occasion to the tune *Ellers* by E.J. Hopkins. The words are poignant and moving: Proudly you gathered, rank on rank, to war / All you had hoped for, all you had, you gave / Splendid you passed, the great surrender made. They have, however been a source of controversy, suggesting that soldiers were responding to God's call and that their sacrifice was akin to the sacrifice of Our Lord. Perhaps for this reason the hymn does not appear in any of the major hymn books, though it remains much loved by many.

#### Prayers to Remember

O GOD the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that, as there is but one Body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all; so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Prayer for Unity from the Book of Common Prayer (1662)*

## The Present Moment



In Jewish weddings in New Testament times, the groom took the bride from her father's house to his own, but only when family negotiations were finished. This explains the delay in this case and why the guests were left waiting in today's Gospel. The foolish bridesmaids went off to find oil, hoping to find a late-night merchant perhaps, so they were too late to welcome the couple. The message here is to be ready because there are always things to do that could never have been predicted.

The technology available to us today can mean we think that what is happening somewhere else is more important than what is happening in front of us. It can be more important to talk to someone who's not there, rather than someone we are actually with. Today's Gospel also reminds us not everything is instantaneous and underlines the importance of waiting. We need to focus on the here and now because it is important to live in the present. That's where we will find God. Whether the groom arrives early or late does not matter if He is always part of our everyday life, through prayer and sacrament.