



READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 10 MAY 2020 – THE 5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

The Collect

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Psalm 31.1-5

- 1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame; ♦
deliver me in your righteousness.

- 2 Incline your ear to me; ♦
make haste to deliver me.

- 3 Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold; ♦
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.

- 4 Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me, ♦
for you are my strength.

- 5 Into your hands I commend my spirit, ♦
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
And to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning is now
And shall be for ever. Amen.

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Acts 7.55-end

Luke writes of the stoning of Stephen, who had been chosen to be a deacon for the very early Church in Jerusalem and is described as 'a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 6.5) *Stephen became the Church's first martyr recorded in the New Testament. This reading follows his speech to the Council, where he is on trial for blasphemy.*

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he (*Stephen*) gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

John 14.1-14

(Jesus said ...)

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own: but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Reflection

St John's words may hold deeply precious memories for you. Let's hear again Jesus say to each of us, as he did to his first disciples on the night before he died, *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me... I go to prepare a place for you.* When hearts are so troubled by what is going on, we need this reminder of Christ's reassurance and his loving care for all those the Father has given him. Above all we hear again his promise that there is life beyond death in the one who is the way, the truth and the life. And God in Christ Jesus always keeps his promises!

Jesus was preparing his friends for the devastation to come the next day. Coronavirus is devastating our lives, and hearing the numbers of those who have died every day is our continuing and deeply shocking lament.

But what about the end of the reading? *If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.* Vs 14. Are we praying that God will end this dreadful plague? I trust and hope we are, but it hasn't happened yet. Almost all of us will have had an experience of praying in faith and trust, and of that prayer going un-answered. We are often told if we speak about this, that our prayer wasn't answered as we wanted, but it was answered. Sometimes that can help. But right now, perhaps like millions of people of faith over thousands of years, what may help more is to be completely honest with God about just how angry and desperate we are that people are dying, that we can't see and touch our loved ones, that we are lonely and afraid, that people are on the breadline, and hungry - that we desperately want it to stop, now! It's ok to express our anger to God. God is big enough to take all we can throw at him and we're not somehow letting him down, if we do. It's not an either/or – either we rest in the peace and trust of the first verses, or we wrestle with God (even reject God?) because our prayers feel unanswered. Our faith allows us to hold all of that together in Christ. Just look at the psalms, our most ancient hymns and prayers. You won't have to turn many pages of the Bible before you'll find someone ranting in anger and pain to the Lord. What you'll also find is how in expressing their lament the psalmist is also led to a new place of trust and joy, despite everything. Try praying with Psalm 22, or write your own psalm of lament about how you are really feeling in all of this. God can take it! And take hold of the blessing and the promise of and in Christ Jesus, who is our way, our truth, our life.

*God be with you, in it all ~ with my love and prayers,
Mary-Lou*