

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 9 MAY 2021 – 6th Sunday of Easter

COLLECT

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us
to eternal joy;
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.

Psalm 98

- 1 Sing to the Lord a new song, ◆
for he has done marvellous things.
- 2 His own right hand and his holy arm ◆
have won for him the victory.
- 3 The Lord has made known his salvation; ◆
his deliverance has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
- 4 He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness
towards the house of Israel, ◆
and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
- 5 Sound praises to the Lord, all the earth; ◆
break into singing and make music.
- 6 Make music to the Lord with the lyre, ◆
with the lyre and the voice of melody.
- 7 With trumpets and the sound of the horn ◆
sound praises before the Lord, the King.
- 8 Let the sea thunder and all that fills it, ◆
the world and all that dwell upon it.
- 9 Let the rivers clap their hands ◆
and let the hills ring out together before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
- 10 In righteousness shall he judge the world ◆
and the peoples with equity.

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Acts 10.44-48

44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

John 15.9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection – this week from Hannah

Love, love, love... love is mentioned quite a lot in this passage! Jesus was preparing for his death, and these words follow straight on from the description of the vine and branches, which was last week's Gospel reading. Though there is rich imagery, plenty to discuss and ponder, in some ways it's hard to get past the implications of the opening sentences. 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love'.

At home-group on Zoom this week, we spent some time thinking about that phrase 'now remain in my love'. Some translations use the word 'abide'. We were unanimous in our opinion that abide was a much better word! When the original Greek is considered, both translations pick up the meaning, but perhaps 'abide' feels more settled, more comforting and certainly more homely. Abide... abode... to make a home. Christ asks us to make our home in him, and he makes his home in us. That intimacy is developed as the passage continues, with the amazing words that we are not servants of the Lord, but friends. There is openness in this relationship, mutuality and, as verse 11 reminds us, there is joy.

Now perhaps I'm projecting my own tendency onto others here, but somewhere along the way, the 'dutiful' Christian has evolved and can sometimes take over. I know it well! Well-meaning as

it might be, it sends us to the place of servant, rather than friend- and that is not the Gospel. Something is lost and diminished when we forget the friendship that is the characteristic of love, and to which we are called. That phrase 'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete' is a tonic here, because it reminds us that making our home in Christ is a thing of delight and flourishing, not the rather deadening business of carrying out our duties because it is the correct thing to do.

So as we dwell in Jesus and he in us, we find our true selves and true joy. That doesn't mean it is easy though. Many writers down the years have noted that living in Christ is far from the comfortable, snugly experience we might imagine- it's not like the cordial, almost sleepy company of Ratty and Mole in *Wind in the Willows* for example, gathered round a fire, sharing a drink and a joke, bunkered down from the elements. No. As one writer puts it, if we invite Jesus to dwell with us, we must expect him to disrupt- to start knocking walls through, putting on annexes, opening doors... as the previous passage about the vine and branches tells us, he will change us, prune us, shape us, expand our thinking and enlarge our compassion. Peter experienced this in the reading from Acts as he says 'Surely no-one can stand in the way of their being baptised'. Relentlessly, through the love that is rooted in Christ and shared with each other, the Gospel grows and grows. It did then, as those first followers gradually (and rather chaotically) learned about its true scope- which was so much larger than their assumptions. It does now, as we are still learning the same thing in our time and place. This prayer of St Paul comes to mind, and feels as relevant today as ever, as we continue to grapple with the gap between our understanding of love, and God's. Perhaps we can make it our prayer over the coming week:

*'I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'*
Ephesians 3:17b-19