

Easter 6 2020

John 14.15-21

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you...

Beginning the journey out of lockdown is a lot trickier than going into it. One thing is clear though, unlocking the lockdown is not a process that is going to happen quickly (churches not back to 'normal' this year) and we will have to live in a state of provisionality. With lockdown a paradigm shift has taken place. In other words, the way that we see the world and ourselves and others has been challenged with consequences for the way we think, relate and behave. We are experiencing a different reality.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus is preparing the little community around him for trauma. They don't understand what is coming but they are aware that his language is changing. He seems to speak in riddles. It's making them insecure, all this talk about leaving them. He's preparing them for a different understanding of reality. A paradigm shift. And it happens at speed with his arrest and execution. They lurch into grief and loss. **'We had hoped that he was the one who was going to save us...'** bemoan the two followers on the Emmaus Rd to the stranger.

They had invested in him for their future reality and now there isn't one. What is their future? Then, just as suddenly, another version of reality dawns. He is risen! Everything changes again but it is not the same as before. Jesus is back but he says **Don't hold onto me he says**. Still the future is unclear. Actually, they cannot even imagine what it might look like. It's beyond them.

Can you make the connections with our own insecurities and feeling that the future is uncertain? A recent article charting the journey of the last few weeks concludes by suggesting that there are some green shoots, hints about the future but don't rush to formulate answers. **Love the questions and live with them without seeking answers.**

The advice that Jesus gives the disciples does not contain a blueprint for the future. It leaves them with questions that they will have to live with for a while. Instead, he uses the language of promise. And what's going on behind that is a question of allegiance. Remember Peter by the lakeside confronted by the risen Jesus. 'Do you love me?' Because if you love me, you will keep my commandments... The word 'keep' lit means 'watch' rather than 'fulfil'. The commandments of Christ do not lend themselves to measurement, the 'to-do' list approach to faith.

Rather they concern the quality of our life – loving neighbours, one another, enemies, practising forgiveness. And devotion to Christ inspires that desire to embrace Christ's way. If you love me you will naturally desire this way, you will be agents of God's love in world. Love / devotion births obedience.

And what if that love has grown cold in us? How might it be provoked to a flame? I think that the answer to that has something to do with the language of promise.

Consider this:

I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever...(the Spirit). Just as Jesus led them, stood alongside them, gave them confidence by his presence, emboldened them, so the Spirit will be to them.

And this is not a one-off special visitation, this is God moving in.

He abides with you and will be in you. This will be a permanent state. Once given, never withdrawn. **To be with you for ever.**

Then, **I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.**

An immensely strong statement full of relational intensity. This is a family matter Jesus says. God's commitment to us remains.

And the promises keep coming... **Because I live, you also will live... Those who love me will be loved... I will reveal myself to them.** Do we trust the one making these promises? Yes, Jesus, my Way, my Truth and my Life. Then you are inhabiting the promise.

Here is no advice about the strategy or instruction for the unknown future. It is about God, by Spirit, being present to us and us being present to God. In these days we are losing some of our securities as individuals and as a church. A new paradigm is opening up. And we don't know how it is going to be. Can I suggest that this passage is a gift for these times. Spend time with it, let it speak to you. Let the Spirit who is at home in you, praying in you, inspire your prayers for you have not been left orphaned.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen.