

Pentecost 2018

Introduction

What were you doing yesterday morning?

Sitting comfortably with a cup of tea -or something slightly more celebratory – watching The Wedding?

It was a picture-perfect day. After this, when all the excitement has faded and life returns to 'normal', I am sure that Harry and Meghan will be wondering 'What next?'

I was at a conference last week focussing on Women in Ministry and the question for us was, What Next?

The disciples who had lived through the heady excitement of Palm Sunday, the horror of Jesus trial and execution, the incomparable joy and belief-stretching of the resurrection, must have wondered, after the pain of parting at the Ascension, What next?

Do you wonder What Next for the Church?

I do!

1 When the Spirit comes

Jesus told his disciples that they could look forward to the Spirit's coming. The Holy Spirit would guide into all truth.

What exactly is truth? Today we are confused about the concept.

Christians are no exception! I had an email from a Christian organisation with a heading *This email is Not about GDPR*.

Oh good, I thought but was extremely annoyed when I opened the email. It said Sorry, we weren't telling you the truth, this is about GDPR. Not good enough in this age of half truths, your truth, my truth, mistruth and untruth!

As followers of Christ, we are called to be honest, open and truth-ful. *True God from true God* we say in the Nicene Creed. Truth is rooted in who God is, God's nature. God is true in all his ways.

This is linked with another biblical word that sometimes rolls off our tongues without our thinking too much about it: righteousness. God's righteousness is rooted in creation, God's covenant to *bless, multiply and sustain human beings made to hold fellowship with God and be recipients of his fatherly care. ...Loyalty to this relationship of mutual love and faithfulness ... is called 'righteousness'* (Atkinson and Field 1995:743).

Truth for the Christian is personal and practical.

We are called to

live the truth,

tell the truth;

do the truth, as well as

know the truth. (Atkinson and Field 1995:867).

The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth – into ever deepening relationship with the One who is truth. It's difficult to be transparently honest – not all promises can be kept; all too often we deceive ourselves. But the more we are open and listening to and engaging with the Holy Spirit, the more we will grow into truth-ful-ness. It requires a willingness to change - and sometimes saying sorry. It's hard to be flexible and change – especially, let's be honest, when we get older and we think we've seen it and know it all!

If we are willing and open, the Holy Spirit will flow in and do the rest. And you will know joy, profound joy. The truth sets you free, to love, to be loved. There's no more pretence, hiding behind half truth and deception. One day we will realise: I am thinking differently about this issue, I am feeling differently about that person, I'll be able to be quite truthful about...

Why?

Because.....

2 The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness

Those who have watched, given birth to a baby, or *Call the Midwife* will perhaps realise that.

Romans 8 speaks quite graphically about the work of the Spirit in terms of childbirth. It's not quite the happy sanitised version where the cleaned up baby smiles up at its well-rested parents, but the real version where there is far too much groaning and pain and blood. This is a good metaphor, because the point of all that anguish is that the child is about to be born.

In the middle of labour it is possible to almost forget that it will ever end and that there will be an outcome. But the Holy Spirit, like the midwife, keeps [people] straining and pushing. 'come on, you're nearly there I can see the head now, the Holy Spirit shouts, reminding us constantly why we are doing this' (Williams 2005:71)

Sometimes change is really painful. Doing things differently hurts. Walking into the unfamiliar is scary. And when we hardly even know what to pray for, or how to pray, the Holy Spirit groans with us, articulates our groans and complaints, our longings and sighs and presents it all to God. *The Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, says Paul.*

The Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.

What next?

What is God's will for you, for me, for us as a church – and I don't mean Anglican or Methodist, but us as a Church?

Don't even think about praying 'I don't mind what happens to the church/chapel, as long as it sees me out' It is definitely not God's will!

We know from Jesus' life and prayer what God's will is for us.

- A new commandment..... love one another.
- Father, may they be one, even as we are one. Unity. Love. Care. Justice.
- *Righteousness-* that relationship of mutual love and faithfulness - *is available because I go to the Father* said Jesus

3 The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me

The Holy Spirit encourages us

onward, ever deeper into God's love,
onward and ever deeper into love for one another.

If you watched The Wedding yesterday, you could not have missed Bishop Michael Curry's remarkable sermon! He quoted Teilhard de Chardin who said

Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, [humankind] will have discovered fire.

The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.

What has the Spirit received from Jesus?

Tell my people

- to love one another,
- to be considerate and respectful,
- to break down the barriers that divide and hurt and keep my people separate,
- to care for one another,
- to share together in worship, in love, in joy.

Tell my people

I love them

and

tell my people

to love one another and
to share my love with those who don't know love.

And urge my people

not to be constricted by the old ways of doing things. Think and live out of the box.

Remind my people that

new wine is not put into old wineskins, otherwise there is a disaster, the old wineskins will burst.

Put the new wine of new life into new wineskins.

Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. (Galatians 5:25) It's not an optional extra!

We've reached a point in our respective church/chapel lives where we have to do things differently.

For survival?

No, it's more profound than that.

It's about

- knowing God,
- coming to the fire of his love,
- letting that fire melt away the stuff that makes it difficult to change and experiencing perhaps once again, perhaps for the first time, what it is to be truly loved, and then sharing that love with others

Bishop Michael Curry said powerfully

Think and imagine a world

where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families

where love is the way.

Imagine our neighborhoods and communities where love is the way.

Imagine our governments and nations

where love is the way.

Imagine business and commerce

where love is the way.

Imagine this tired old world

where love is the way.

When love is the way – unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.

When love is the way,

then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again.

When love is the way,

we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness

like an ever-flowing brook.

*When love is the way,
poverty will become history.
When love is the way,
the earth will be a sanctuary.*

What next?

Conclusion

Come Holy Spirit of truth
*whom the world can never grasp,
touch our hearts with the shock of your coming;
fill us with desire for your disturbing peace;
and fire us with longing to speak your uncontainable word;
through Jesus Christ. Amen.* (Morely 1992:17)

References

Atkinson and Field , editors (1995), *New Dictionary of Ethics and Pastoral Theology*
Janet Morely (1992), *All Desires Known*
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20th May 2018