

Reflection for 6th Sunday of Easter by Jacqueline Kemp (*Lay Reader*)

Since Easter, the Old Testament readings have been replaced by extracts from the book of Acts. The church, for a short while, does not ask us to look back to Jewish history, wisdom, and prophesy but concentrates on the joyful realisation of resurrection. We read about the excitement of the followers of Jesus spreading His message, the good news, throughout the known world.

Here we have Paul telling the crowds that he has seen their multiple tributes to the gods, statues made of stone and gold, and tells them that the God they are seeking cannot be 'held' in this way but is the Almighty one who created them and the whole world. A new world had been started, the rule of this Almighty God, the Kingdom of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ.

Last weekend marked the 75th. Anniversary of the end of WW2. Because of the present situation, we were unable to have parades and street parties. We could instead watch old newsreel scenes of the ecstatic crowds outside Buckingham Palace and in Trafalgar Square celebrating the almost unbelievable news that all the suffering was over. We watched as very elderly veterans reflected on their wartime experiences. My father did not even claim his medals. Like so many, all he wanted was to settle down to his job and family life. But things would never be the same again. Rebuilding both practically and socially started straight away; a huge house-building programme, NHS, secondary education for all, a home fit for heroes.

There is so much resonance here with the beginnings of the Christian church and the present situation with the frightening Covid 19 pandemic. After the crucifixion of Jesus, after six years of War on a massive scale, after an epidemic with no known cure or vaccine, normal life will never be the same again. People have been confined to their homes, many have been bereaved, many jobs have been lost. There has been time to reflect on what is important in life; family and friends, a supply of food, supporting the most deprived. Many of our able-bodied people have responded practically, our medical staff are seen as heroes. This is rich soil for the Christian message to be sown. Peter 3 v 15-16, gives good advice about how to respond to someone who wants to know more about our faith.

When Jesus was asked how to pray, He gave us a pattern with five headings. The second sentence was, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. For Christians, this is a commitment. If I were to choose the hymns for this Sunday I would include 'Thy kingdom come O God'. I shall be using it as a prayer this Sunday.

But do you feel this is all too much for us to cope with? The gospel reading for today is hard to follow. Jesus talking to his friends just before He is arrested wants them to understand and yet He seems to be talking in riddles. Verse 19,20 '... you will see that I live and you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.' Jesus assures them of help, the Spirit of God, the advocate, who will be with them forever. In verse 17, 'the Spirit is with you, he is in you.' This new life in God is dynamic, like a dance.

On my bookshelf there is a book with the title "Participating in God". The cover carries as illustration a painting by Matisse called 'Dance'. It shows five female dancers with hands clasped to form a circle. The book is about God, the Trinity and pastoral challenges. It embraces modern dynamic views of the world where what is real is not necessarily physical and static. I have never seen electricity or gravity but know they exist. God is about relationship and invites us to join in with His dance. We become an essential element in the whole loving enterprise. When we speak to another about our faith we take their hand and invite them to join in. It makes me think about the Shaker hymn, 'Lord of the Dance'. Maybe this is a lesson for another day !

Meanwhile, I remember you in my prayers and hope we will be able to meet together again soon. Amen.