

## **SERMON FOR ST GEORGE'S EASTERGATE: MAY 17<sup>TH</sup> 2020.**

**In our Collect this morning we prayed to the Lord that “by His continual presence with us we may be lifted to eternal joy” we could certainly do with that in the times that we are in! The world is changing around us and nothing about the way that the society of human beings operates will be the same way after this pandemic...and of course the church is included in this, very much so. Hitherto we may well have worried about the fact that the people around us seem perfectly happy without any kind of faith and not very interested if at all in the Gospel that we proclaim. But there are suggestions in our readings today that perhaps instead of trying to persuade people to come to church we should instead be looking out for signs in the world around that God is at work and that there are connections for us to be making with people about God and how God can be found in the midst of what is going on. What do I mean by that?**

**Well let's look at the first century and how Paul was relating to the world around him. The fact that we are being encouraged to look at this incident should be seen as part of our preparation for the feast of Pentecost...the birthday of the Christian church as we know it. This is in fact the only reading from the book of Acts that we read this year which moves away from Jerusalem and makes clear that the knowledge of God is available for all people everywhere.; and that is of interest to us because that means the people we share our lives with today! Paul, in Athens the centre of the world of learning and philosophy in the Greek world, looked all around him and took in the apparent interest in spiritual things made evident by the statues to various gods. Looking at all that, he**

tapped in to where he saw people coming from by acknowledging that a certain knowledge of God is readily available to all people by natural means; but he also makes clear that only by believing in the one true God who created the world we live in does the world really make sense. He drew them in by quoting from Greek poetry and and saying very directly to all who would listen that “in Him we live and move and have our being”...in other words He is not far from any of us and is readily available to all. He then moved to a more personal note and talked about the fact that there was really no excuse for ignorance of the one true God and when he mentioned the resurrection of Jesus from the dead there became apparent a division of his audience...some mocked but others wanted to know more. By bringing in the idea that human moral behaviour matters to our creator God Paul tried to move his audience beyond a mere academic interest in a distant God.

This is really where our Gospel reading takes up the story. In the world we are living in today it couldn't be more apparent that the way human beings behave towards one another matters beyond all else. Our Gospel starts with Jesus' words to his followers “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” In other words that is the badge of being a Christian...if we profess a Christian creed without loving God and our fellow human beings then we cannot expect to be listened to...especially at the moment!

The context of this conversation between Jesus and his disciples is still at the last supper...before he leaves them he offers them, and us, the key to all Christian hope. He mentions the word Paraclete...more modernly translated these days as Advocate. A paraclete was literally someone who was called to stand alongside another. In a legal setting we use another translation from the greek..Advocate...in the legal sense to talk about a defence lawyer.

**Someone who is prepared to protect and defend another. Jesus talks of Himself as asking God his Father to send such a person to be with his followers when he no longer can...who will be a comforting presence when he is no longer with them physically. Is this not a message we would want to be able to convey to many worried and anxious people around us? Indeed is this not the message we need for ourselves today?**

**And its not just a reassuring presence that this Advocate will bring but also a fuller understanding of the truth of all that Jesus said and did. This invisible presence that the followers of Jesus are given Jesus says can only be realised through the eyes of faith.**

**This should give us, the Christian church, a new confidence that down through the ages, despite the failings of the church which can and do, hinder the work of the Advocate, God's presence will never desert His church.**

**So, in conclusion, what is it that we the church have to offer in today's world? We know from our own experience that our Father God is a continual presence in our lives by His Spirit and that this tremendous reassurance that God is there despite what is going on around us is available to all people in the world. We are also seeing that huge numbers of people are demonstrating in their own lives that the self sacrificial love demonstrated by Jesus himself is the only positive way that human society can operate. There are vast numbers of people who do not usually worship in our churches who know in their hearts that God's way is the right way. What we also see is that many people do not have the confidence to believe that God is there and is interested in them. In the future we, the people of God, really need to be out there sharing what it means to us to have a relationship with our heavenly Father.**

**Looking back at our reading from Acts we saw that Paul connected with the people around him by acknowledging their spiritual quests and then moved on by showing that Jesus fulfilled these...it was the assurance that this Jesus had not ceased to exist after his crucifixion but had risen from the dead...and as we know had appeared in a vision to Saul [Paul] to give him the reassurance that this was the case, that motivated Paul to stick his neck out and speak to people in this way . We are still in the weeks following our celebration of Easter...it is the assurance that death is not the end of the story that should motivate us similarly . And of course it is that message that all those around us really need at this time.**

**AMEN.**