



Sunday, 17 May, 2020

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Almost two months into lockdown, we come to the Sixth Sunday of Easter, which means that this Thursday is also Ascension Day. Additionally, we remember two Anglo-Saxon saints (although one was more famous for his time in France), Dunstan and Alcuin. If you get to the notices, you will discover that we are also venturing into the world of Zoom services, which I am sure can't possibly go wrong...

There doesn't seem to be as much by way of introduction this week, so I shall fill the space with a picture on which you can duly reflect.

Phil



Collect and Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

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 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.

First Reading (Acts 17:22-31)

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, ‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.” Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and

imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

Second Reading (1 Peter 3:13-end)

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Gospel Reading (John 10:1-10)

Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Reflection for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Phil Bradford

You may recall that years ago, the BBC aired a series called *Grumpy Old Men*, which featured middle-aged male celebrities complaining about aspects of modern life which irritated them (in the interests of gender equality, I should mention that there was also a female counterpart, *Grumpy Old Women*, but obviously I would not have got a part in that). I rather resented the idea that there was an age qualification for being grumpy or complaining about features of the contemporary world. I have never really found a problem in finding things to complain about, age notwithstanding. One of the things which has always irritated and bemused me is adverts. There was a time, I am sure, even if it was before I was born, when adverts were straightforward, with a picture of the relevant item with its name: buy this brand of soap. I can prove this by looking at old magazines. Now, many adverts (on TV especially) require intense concentration to find the link between the presentation and the product, and even at the end of the commercial one can remain unclear about what it is you are meant to have been persuaded to buy, the glitzy presentation leading to bewilderment. Many adverts seem to be based on the idea that I should be dissatisfied with myself and my lifestyle: all I need to do is put this cream on my skin and this dye on my hair and start wearing this brand of clothes to look older or younger or more stylish; surely I couldn't possibly be satisfied with my living room when I could have a 60-inch, HD, LCD TV that could turn it into a home cinema? Advertising slogans drive these points home, and these days even politicians have muscled in on the act. There is something disturbing about the underlying principle of these adverts, which is in some ways reflective of modern life, that we can and should never be satisfied with who we are and what we have, when we can have more. In the twenty-first century, we worship wealth, beauty and success, the intangible and unknowable gods of our age.

Two millennia after Paul found the altar to the unknown god in Athens, we live in a world where the streets are lined with shrines to unknown gods. They may be people, like Che in Cuba, or Atatürk in Turkey, or Gandhi in India, or Jefferson in the United States, or Paul himself in certain forms of evangelicalism. They may be objects, such as technology, or fashion, or property, or money, or churches. Or they may be concepts or ideologies: sovereignty, independence, scientific rationalism, secularism, religion. People make idols of that which reassures them and then invest those idols with the properties of the divine, attributing salvation to them. We create God in our own image, so that all too often what we worship is a shadow god, something onto which we project our prejudices to justify ourselves and our own way of life. Religion (and human life in general) can too easily become entirely about comfort and feeling validated, easy when we have deified mute people, objects or concepts which cannot challenge or unsettle us. Our gods are less tangible than the gold, silver and stone idols of Paul's Athens, but as false gods that intangibility makes them more dangerous, for we are less alert to their destructive power. Our shrines to unknown gods are a testament to our desire for control, of a search for heroes who can only affirm us in their unreality. It is interesting, even if unnerving, to have been forced to confront these past few weeks just how much of our lives have come to be built on idolatry, particularly the idolatry of wealth and markets.

As Paul challenged those lifeless Athenian idols, so too must we face up to the need to challenge the idols of our own age, to ask why society is so accepting of the deification of wealth and status. As Christians, we believe not in a remote, unknown god who always tells us we are right, but in that God who 'made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth'. We believe in a God who made himself known in human flesh, and through that flesh did indeed achieve our salvation. He is no lifeless statue sitting on an altar to be praised, nor a picture on

a wall looking down on us benignly, nor a relic of the past who can be safely quoted in time-honoured, immutable words. This is a living God, a God who knows and loves everything that he has made, who speaks into all generations and entrusts each of us with the work of his kingdom. And that Spirit of truth to which Jesus refers in this morning's gospel, the Spirit of truth which the Father sends to those who believe and keep his commandments, does not let us rest secure and comfortable. If we are truly open to the Holy Spirit, we are prepared to be unsettled and challenged, to be used by God in ways we often cannot imagine and to see the certainties around us crumble into dust. To accept that Spirit is to be willing to see the unknown, false gods of the world around us for the deceptions they are, idols which deceive us into feeling secure and thus prevent us from reaching out in love into the dark, frightening places of our world.

Think about the crucifixes and crosses which adorn our churches, or hang round people's necks, and ask whether they too are shrines to unknown, dead idols, relics of a half-forgotten past, or whether they symbolise for us the dynamism of a God continually active in human history? Are they markers of churches and communities which is a place of prayer, of people who seek the living God and who pray to the God who has made himself known humanity for the strength to love and to be given the courage to do God's work, however unlikely and difficult it may seem? The empty cross is a reminder of the great unpredictability of God, the God who defied all the known rules and certainties of human history to raise his son from the dead and destroy the power of death and evil. The faith to which Jesus bore witness was not a static faith of certitudes, but rather a faith which demolished the idols and unknown gods of his own world, not least the abuse of wealth and power, challenging those who were willing to listen to him to abandon the safety of their lives to risk transforming the world around them. To know the true, living God means knowing and accepting his love for us

and being willing to show that love to other people, whoever and whatever they are. It means knowing that the future is God's, and that we do not truly serve him if all we try to do is cling desperately to the past, something particularly to reflect upon at this time. Above all, it means being willing to accept that the way of love is costly, for it will bring us into conflict with those who prefer the security of their false gods, and yet we are called equally to love and pray for those people. Amidst the hatreds and injustices of our world, we are called to bear witness to God by loving one another in spite of everything, to remind the world of this simple scriptural truth: 'Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love'.

Dunstan

Tuesday 19 May

Born in the early tenth century to a noble Somerset family, Dunstan entered the monastic life after recovering from illness. He became abbot of Glastonbury in 943, before becoming bishop of Worcester in 957 and London in 958 (holding both together), then finally archbishop of Canterbury in 959. As archbishop, he officiated at the coronations of King Edgar at Bath (in 973, towards the end of the king's reign), and of his sons Edward the Martyr and Æthelred II (the Unready). As abbot of Glastonbury, he had initiated wide-ranging monastic reforms. As archbishop, together with (Arch)Bishop Oswald of Worcester and York and Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, Dunstan was the prime mover behind the tenth-century monastic reformation, which saw the monasteries of England re-founded and revitalised after decline during decades of Viking attacks. He died in 988. Along with Oswald and Wulfstan, Dunstan is one of three men to have been bishop of Worcester to have been canonised.

Almighty God,
who raised up Dunstan to be a true shepherd of the flock,
a restorer of monastic life
and a faithful counsellor to those in authority:
give to all pastors the same gifts of your Holy Spirit
that they may be true servants of Christ and of all his people;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.

First Reading (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

Gospel Reading (Matthew 24:42-46)

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. 'Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.

Alcuin of York

Wednesday 20 May

When I first arrived at the University of York, I discovered that it had a semi-collegiate system. The colleges all seemed to be named after distinguished Yorkshiremen, but at first the one named Alcuin confused me. A course on Carolingian history rapidly filled in the gap in my knowledge, and ever since I have been something of a devotee of Alcuin of York. Born c.735 in or around York, he attended and later became master of the Minster School. In 781, he crossed over to the continent to join Charlemagne's court at Aachen. He was a poet, writer, liturgist and noted scholar of the court which became famous for its learning, establishing a library during his time there. In 796 he became abbot of Tours, dying at the monastery in 804.

God of wisdom, eternal light,
who shone in the heart of your servant Alcuin,
revealing to him your power and pity:
scatter the darkness of our ignorance
that, with all our heart and mind and strength,
we may seek your face
and be brought with all your saints
to your holy presence;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.

First Reading (Colossians 3:12-16)

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Gospel Reading (John 4:19-24)

The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

Ascension Day

Thursday 21 May

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that as we believe your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
to have ascended into the heavens,
so we in heart and mind may also ascend
and with him continually dwell;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

First Reading (Acts 1:1-11)

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out

of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Second Reading (Ephesians 1:15-end)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel Reading (Luke 24:44-end)

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be

proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

Article

The following piece was suggested to me for inclusion in this week's pew sheet and is used courtesy of Parish Pump.

Nigel Beeton works in Radiology in a hospital in the East of England. During this time of the coronavirus crisis, he is writing a weekly diary of his life at the hospital.

Friday 1st May

Is it too early to start using the past tense with regard to Covid-19?

Well, yes, of course it is. To abuse Winston Churchill's quote, this certainly is not the end, but it just might be the 'end of the beginning'. At our hospital, we are down to just five patients remaining in intensive care, for which I (and many others) thank the Lord.

I have a feeling that the turning point was Wednesday (22nd). Up to then I seemed to have my visor on as much as off, assisting my staff, mainly in CT.

Then, on Thursday, they didn't call me at all! Friday was a bit busier, but today (Sunday) the feeling that things are calming down is becoming more widespread.

I write with some trepidation, for even as a Christian I'm superstitious about using the 'Q' word. ('Quiet'. NEVER use that word in the presence of a working health professional!)

I apologise, Gentle Reader, for my darker blogs of a week or two ago, when I was raging at idiots for breaking the lockdown. Indeed, I was tired, and I can now share that I had fallen victim not to the virus but to a virus, when an agonizing rash spread across the right side of my body.

My GP asked me (on the phone) if I had been tired and run down. My slightly abrupt reply of 'haven't we all?' got a grunt of assent before she diagnosed me with an attack of the shingles. But now I find it feels less

as though I've lost a fight with an aggrieved stallion and my own mood is lifting along with many of my colleagues, so I find myself able to give thanks that so many did observe the lockdown, and now we begin to see the benefits.

Sometimes over the past few years the NHS has felt like a bit of a public whipping boy, and indeed sometimes we have let people down, and if you are one of those people I am genuinely very sorry; but please don't ever think we do not care. We do. We get up in the morning in the hope of doing good, prepared to do daily battle with the forces that combine to do harm to the populations we serve. The Coronavirus is but one of those enemies, if you are concerned that any of the others have you in its grip, heart disease, cancer, anything, then do seek help; we in the NHS will do our best to help you and to protect you from any other kind of harm.

But suddenly we in the NHS are getting thanked. For forty years I have plodded towards various hospitals at various odd times of day or night, and never once has anybody stopped me and said 'thank you'. Nor would I have expected it (they do pay me!) but that is exactly what happened to me on Monday morning. I was just getting onto the site when a lady who I have never met asked me if I worked at the hospital. I replied in the affirmative, wondering what was coming. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you so much, all of you."

Well, thank you, ma'am. I cannot tell you how much the appreciation and support of the general public has meant to us all. The rainbows in the windows, the 'I love the NHS' slogans appearing everywhere; the clapping on Thursday evenings. And let us pray that, standing together as we have done, perhaps we are all beginning to turn the corner.

Notices

Ascension Day

Sarah is organising a Zoom 'Songs of Praise service for Ascension Day at 7pm on Thursday, 21 May. Everyone is welcome to take part, but you will need to have an invitation. Sarah will be very happy to send one by e-mail if you contact her. If you haven't used Zoom before, don't worry – it is easy and we will be happy to provide instructions!

Important Numbers

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|---------------------------|---------------|
| Childline | 0800 1111 |
| Samaritans | 116 123 |
| Domestic Violence Hotline | 0808 2000 247 |
| The Survivors Trust | 0808 801 0181 |
| Mind | 0300 123 3393 |
| Age UK | 0800 169 6565 |

Care Homes

A reminder that with care homes in lockdown, their residents are particularly isolated at this time. Juniper House have told us that they would especially appreciate it if anyone were able to write letters, or children were able to draw bright pictures, to cheer people up and give them some contact with others during a difficult period. There are further details on the St Michael's website and Facebook page (see below), or please do contact Philip Evans if you would be able to help.

Resources

A reminder of our online presence.

St John's Website www.stjohninbedwardine.co.uk

St Michael's Website www.stmichaels.westworcesterchurches.org.uk

St John's Facebook www.facebook.com/stjohninbedwardine

St Michael's Facebook www.facebook.com/stmichaelsdinesgreen

Various prayer resources and information are also available on the Church of England website. For those without internet access, the archbishop of Canterbury has launched a 24-hour freephone number for a service called Daily Hope, which offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services: **0800 804 8044**.