

## **Sermon for 8 May, 2022 : ORNC Chapel Eucharist with Baptism**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Please do be seated.

Three weeks ago, we celebrated Easter here at the Chapel.

And it was a glorious service!

The Chapel was full. The biggest congregation we've had for three years.

The Choir were on top form. The sun was warm and shining brightly. The new leaves on the trees shimmered with new spring growth. People were out and about in family groups all over Greenwich.

It was a resurrection for us all in so many ways. And it felt utterly joyful!

But move on three weeks and I think we could be forgiven if we feel we're somehow stuck back in Good Friday. Now as then, a time beset with betrayals, fear, struggles for power, violence against the innocent and death.

Indeed, our present 'too interesting times' may seem not far short of apocalyptic. Nation rising up against nation. Wars and rumours of wars. Droughts and floods and violent storms. Earthquakes and famines in various places. People fleeing conflict in so many parts of the world, including Ukraine.

Not to mention the increasingly damaging impacts of climate change, the relentless inflation of prices for the essentials of fuel and food, and families having to make impossible choices about how to use their stretched resources.

We long for some escape, some solution to all these woes. For something better, fairer, in which human greed, selfishness, exploitation and violence don't seem to have the upper hand.

Our Easter joy seems so distant and fleeting. Darkness and fear are all around. And we may be asking ourselves the question : 'Where is God in all of this?'

It's timely then that, in our Gospel reading today, Jesus offers some answers. Pointing to the ways God has been and is acting in the midst of our wounded and suffering world.

He reminds us of the promise of eternal life for all. The redemption of all creation which he has won for us on the cross by his pure and overflowingly abundant love for us. A promise made plain to us in his resurrection.

The ultimate end of sin and death. The ultimate healing which we could never deserve or earn or merit or achieve on our own. Pure, loving gift. Pure grace. For every and for any one. For all who simply open their hands and their hearts to the Lord and say 'yes'.

And this promise is a great comfort and a source of deep peace and hope for our eternal future. Knowing that what we may have thought was our end is not the end.

But rather, it's a place in God's Kingdom where, as we heard in our reading from Revelation, there is no more hunger or thirst or suffering or tears or fear.

And yet. And yet ...

As wonderful and amazing and humbling as this promise is, we're probably still left asking : 'But what about now? What about today? Where is God in all of **this?**

Jesus also gives us an answer in our Gospel. He tells us how God's eternal Kingdom is breaking through into our time bound world, and how he's still present with us in the darkest places.

He says, 'My sheep hear my voice and follow me.'

My followers, he is saying, hear the promise. Believe the promise. Long that everyone may share in the joy and comfort of the promise. And who themselves go about making known the meaning of the promise through acts of self-giving love to others, doing their best to follow the example of our Lord.

Not in their own strength. That would never be enough. But with the strength and support and guidance of our Lord's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who is known in the Trinity as 'the sustainer'.

This engagement by Christians in God's mission in the world, the 'Missio Dei', was the willing response of believers from the very beginning.

We heard of just one example in our reading from Acts, where Peter responds to the request of strangers in need, mourning their beloved friend Tabitha. And Peter prays, and believes, and acts as the channel of the Holy Spirit to restore their friend to them.

The New Testament records many other examples of God at work in the world, doing extraordinary things through ordinary people.

But the Kingdom and its promise didn't stop breaking through in the first century. Or in any other century after that.

We see it as much today in the many and generous ways in which human beings just like us are reaching out to others in need and distress with a self-giving love like God's own love for us.

We've seen it all through the pandemic : in the dedication and compassion of NHS staff in treating the relentless flood of Covid patients; in the long hours and persistence of the scientists working to find effective treatments and vaccines; in the determined work of key workers, keeping us all going with transport, groceries and medical supplies; and in the hundreds and thousands of volunteers who stepped up to help the most vulnerable with shopping and errands, and ferrying to medical appointments, and providing online services and entertainment, and looking out for neighbours, and just being a listening ear on the phone or on Zoom, to help ease the isolation of the lonely.

I know many of you did these things and more. And when you remember them, then know that in all these ways, the Kingdom of God was breaking through.

And we're seeing this, too, every day in our news from other countries and in our country and in our own community, news of people reaching out in compassion and generosity and genuine love to innocent civilians caught up in the horror and evil of the brutal war against Ukraine.

Many have made significant material and personal sacrifices to do this, and to do it for strangers.

Donating goods and money, especially for those fleeing their homes; finding creative ways to transport these things to them; opening their homes, their

hearts and their belongings to strangers; taking the risk of love; listening with empathy and compassion to their stories; giving them space and safety and opportunity. And praying.

People made in the image of God reaching out with God's love wherever and however it is needed.

And when you see and hear about and do these things, then know that the Kingdom of God has come near us.

As Christians, we're enabled to share and show God's love in this world through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us at our baptism, guiding us and sustaining us throughout our journey of earthly life.

This is what little Raphael is about to receive today. And what his parents and god parents will draw upon in themselves to keep their promises to him in nurturing the gift of the Holy Spirit in him in his own life of faith.

He makes a good start, Raphael Daniel, angel and prophet. No pressure then!

But he'll need the continued support of his parents and god parents and the whole community of the faithful, to find his own relationship with God. And to reflect that in his relationships with other people and the whole of creation. Living his life through all the challenges it is bound to bring, not with fear, but with faith, hope and love.

May we, too, stir up this day the gift of the Holy Spirit that is in us, to model those blessed relationships for Raphael and for each other. And so being channels of God's Kingdom breaking through.

Always remembering that God loves us beyond measure. Whatever. Always.

His promise is sure. And it takes away our fear and sustains us in the face of all that is dark and distressing and evil in the world.

It gives us our hope and our peace. And our longing to share this amazing and abundant love with the whole of God's people and all his creation.

God's love for us will never run out.

May our love for him and for our neighbour run as fully and freely and joyfully all the days of our life. And may He Easter in us. Amen.

### Readings :

#### First : Acts 9.36-end

<sup>36</sup> Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas.<sup>[a]</sup> She was full of good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, "Please come to us without delay." <sup>39</sup> So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup> But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, rise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. <sup>42</sup> And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup> And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

#### Second: Revelation 7.9-end

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,<sup>12</sup> saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" <sup>14</sup> I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore are they before the throne of God,  
and serve him day and night within his temple;  
and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.

<sup>16</sup> They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;  
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of living water;  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

**Gospel: John 10.22-30**

<sup>22</sup> It was the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem; <sup>23</sup> it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered round him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; <sup>28</sup> and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me,<sup>[a]</sup> is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."