

19th April 2020

Readings:

Jn 14:15-21 I will not leave you as orphans

Theme: FINAL SUNDAY IN DARFIELD



I don't really like it when someone says, "Please just choose a Bible passage and speak on that" because there's a danger that I will only ever then preach around my favourite passages. I prefer it when a passage is 'set', such as in our Lectionary. Now I know that lectionaries are not perfect, because even with a three year cycle there are huge chunks of the Bible that we miss out on, but today's passage falls well for us.

In our passage today Jesus says "the Father will give you another Counsellor ... I will not leave you as orphans". It fits well for us not because I have any delusions of being like Jesus as I leave this week, but because we all can draw upon that promise whether we stay in Darfield parish or go to Kidderminster.

Mind you, it doesn't always work relying on the Lectionary. One vicar who was leaving had the passage about Abraham and Isaac on their way to Mount Moriah, Genesis 22, when Abraham says to his servant, "You stay here with the donkeys, whilst we go over there to worship".

You've been to us so much more than donkeys!

Back to John 14. We are still on that night before Jesus was crucified, and he is preparing his disciples for his departure. We are in the wonderful position of knowing we can trust his words because they come from one, the only one, who beats death and rises again to prove we can rely completely on what he says.

Let me draw out three things that Jesus talks about on that night: love, obedience and supplies.

v15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And then at the end of our passage, v21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him”.

As Jesus leaves his disciples the most important thing he wants them, and us, to know is that the Christian faith is based upon love: our love for Jesus and the Father’s love for us. If our Christian faith is characterised by anything else, then we must question seriously whether we’ve really caught hold of the Christian faith.

It’s not about following rules and regulations, of engaging in certain ceremonies and rituals, but it is about being drawn in to the love that is there between Father, Son and Holy Spirit - we are invited to experience that eternal triangle of relationship. And we show that we have received and replied positively to that invitation by, as Jesus says, obedience to his command.

Let's just make sure we get that the right way round: we receive the invitation and enter in, and our response is obedience. It's not that we struggle and strive to be obedient in the hope that we might then be offered an invitation!

And what command or commands are we being obedient to exactly? Well, a longer sermon could refer to much, but let me take us just a few verses backwards to John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another".

Love as Jesus has loved: he is about to lay down his life for us on the cross. How are we doing when it comes to loving one another like that? That's why the obedience comes after receiving the invitation - we could never love enough like that if the invitation depended upon how much we loved. And just how can we possibly love like that?

Well, that's where the third thing comes in: love, obedience and supplies. As Jesus leaves his disciples he says that they will not be on their own. Another Counsellor, meaning another in exactly the same mould as Jesus, will be sent by the Father. The call to be obedient to the command of Jesus is met by the Father supplying the power to fulfil it. The Holy Spirit, v17, "lives with you and will be in you". That's why Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you".

And then there is this lovely infinity puzzle. Have you ever stood between two mirrors facing each other and tried to count how many of you there are? The image just goes on and on being reflected. Here, Jesus says, v20, “you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” ... you in me, I in you, you in me ... all because of the Holy Spirit. The Father supplies everything we need in the Holy Spirit.

All of this is available to everyone who receives that invitation to open their lives to Jesus and follow him, to those who will turn to him and believe in him. When we do so, we will discover the reality of what Paul says in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.

Our task is to love one another as Jesus has loved us, to be Jesus to each other by showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We must show the parish that whilst it's possible to be a believer in lockdown isolated on our own, it's even better when we are able to meet together and show that Jesus is the risen, resurrected Lord of all.

Now I know that there is the natural tendency to remember Rectors by some of the defining events or characteristics of their ministry. My first service 10 years ago was a baptism - perhaps you'll remember the 3 Bs of baptism. Or maybe it will be for overseeing the major refurbishment of St Michael's. What about if I suggest I be remembered as the Rector who fitted the hinges on the hatch into the clock chamber? - the dear clock is striking just 5 seconds past the hour at the moment.

Or, do you remember the story of the nervous curate who ascends the steps of the pulpit for his first sermon, and finds a note up there which says, "Give 'em Jesus". That's how I'd like to be remembered, but I must let you decide whether I have accomplished that. It's been my aim.

And I realise that if there are those from Kidderminster who listen in to this later on, then I have given the game away as to what my ministry is all about - except that it's not a game, is it? It's a choice between life in Jesus and death. Let's choose life, and show it by our obedience to his command enabled by his endless supply of power in the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray ... Lord, we can only receive your grace. We do not deserve it, we cannot earn it. It is your gift to us, of your love fully poured out through Jesus on the cross. As we receive it, may it be that which shapes our love and response to others, so that the world around us is drawn to you by what they see in us. For the glory of your holy name.