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Sunday 13 June
Theme: St Barnabas

Isolation Radio Talk

There is no need whatsoever for despair

Good Morning

The Church lives now on what I call, the right side of Pentecost. I long for us to be a people and a place that points always to the presence of God in his world; if you say 'yes' to that, our community, here beside Blagdon Lake, in our homes and families; in society at large, in medicine and law, education, politics, city, business and commerce, the rumour of God, the possibility of God is kept alive. I long to see division healed; care for the marginalised, the dispossessed and the poor; a people and place that expresses joy in living, welcomes the stranger, celebrates all that is good; above all else, a people and place who know God and worship and adore God; our Churches must be places of divine attraction where the soul finds rest, refreshment, comfort and peace, in our relationships with each other and in the still presence of the divine.

I say all this close to the feast of St Barnabas; it is special to me; in a Church dedicated to St Barnabas my own faith grew and matured. How I wish I could be like Barnabas; St Luke tells us he 'was good man and full of the Holy Spirit'.

We know almost nothing about Barnabas; his enthusiasm and sacrifice come to us only briefly through the pages of scripture. What you may be sure of is that the issues facing this good man after he had been made an apostle, and the issues that face you of the 21st century, are not all that dissimilar; however totally different the life lived then and yours lived now. The commonest issue was known long, long before first century Palestine; put into words by the writer of a Psalm, he asked how it was possible to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" [Psalm 137.4].

It is a strange land today with many gods, from football to iPhones, happiness to retail therapy, from choice to rights. The air you breath, once inspired, literally, 'spirit filled' with Christian allusion and metaphor, has been leeches of all that. You need strength and conviction to walk among those that despise the intellectual arguments for the faith that illuminated; gave inspiration; gave meaning; gave culture to this nation. You *are* heirs and must not squander your inheritance.

Many will believe absolutely anything except the gospel of our Saviour; again, I leave it to the psalmist, centuries before Christ, who wrote that it is fools who say "in their hearts, 'There is no God' [Psalm 14.1]. In the long green growing season, we call Trinity, Christians know how vital it is to put time and energy into understanding The Faith; to be able to give an account above the cacophony of the present day. You do that carefully, thoughtfully, not as one who rages against the present times.

'That is not the way you learned Christ!' says St Paul [Ephesians 4.20]. You see that creation is good; you acknowledge it is God's. Some Christians will want a pure Church; cast out those they

judge unsound; forbid entry to those who love God, yet whose way is different. I say that yours must be a Church without walls into which *all* can come in and, with you, discover the face of Christ; that is what a healthy Church is; a church that gives expression to the life of Christ in all that it is and does. This is the same prayerful desire St Paul had, when he expressed his vision for the Church as leading to the time when: "all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" [Ephesians 4.13].

In times, turbulent and uncertain, you have a precious gift to offer. That gift is the hope brought to you in Jesus Christ. This is a principle undergirding the Church's practice and theory. The unique emphasis of the Christian Faith is that God entered the human condition - became human; you carry the marks of divine glory. Jesus is raised from the dead so each woman, each man, is given new hope; the possibility to share in the fellowship of Christ's body, on whatever road that journey takes. In Christ, God gives us abiding tokens of his presence; they are simple objects, symbols of his presence; water, bread, wine. Through them all creation is charged with the spirit of the living God.

At Pentecost the Disciples spoke of the great things that God had done. That is what I do now; I give you a new task. It is to find the way to say 'Jesus is Lord' to a people that turns its back on the very idea of God. You do it I know; you must also find new ways.

Jesus is still among you; the marks of his suffering are plain to see. He knows you; your fears of economic hardship and diminishing resources; of old age and uncertainty; of thinking death as a failure; of volatile enmity between poor and rich; between peoples of different colours and cultures; of hurt between women and men; of damnation towards the LGBTQ community; the exploitation of children; of the eruption of terrible engulfing violence.

You fear for your children and grandchildren. Like the disciples you fear the power of political and economic systems; trust is becoming a rare commodity. There are the guilts you carry; your inner, broken places make you vulnerable; at the last you fear pain, suffering, and finally death.

Do not hide behind locked doors. 'Go and tell them' Jesus says. Tell him, tell her, you need be afraid no more. He knows that like Peter, you have betrayed him; like Thomas, you have doubted him. Resist the temptation to be cynical, sceptical, faithless; do not embrace the spirit of this age of unfaith and doubt and 'I don't care'. Know and believe, Jesus holds nothing against you. Like Peter, Thomas, Mary, Barnabas, and all the others, he wants you to know he has risen; he wants you to know that his love has no bounds. His death set you free and he gives you the Holy Spirit to understand; words to tell the story. Others have done this in centuries past; how else do you have your faith today?

There is no need whatsoever for despair. There is still time to speak of the wonder and the love of God; there is still time to stand in awe at the power, the glory, the majesty of God; there is still time to follow in the steps of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; there is still time to see the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there is still time, as the writer of the Book of Revelation asks of you 'who has an ear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches' [Revelation 2.7].

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray to the one God,
Mother/Father, Word and Spirit,
that our lives may bear witness
to our love and hope in God.

Lord, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure,
unfolding in beauty the green-growing tree,
the changing of seasons in mountain and valley
the stars and the bright restless sea.

Lord, the life of the world is a foundation of goodness
overflowing in labour and passion and pain,
in the sound of the city and silence of wisdom,
in the birth of a child once again.

Lord, the life of the world is the source of our healing.
It rises in laughter and wells up in song;
it springs from the care of the poor and the broken
and refreshes where justice is strong.

So Lord,
we give thanks for the life and give love to you our Maker
and rejoice in the gift of the bright risen Son.
And we will walk in the peace and the power of the Spirit
till the day of our living is done.
Amen.

[Adapted from the song *Oh the life of the world*; Iona Abbey Worship Book, The Iona Community.]