

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 9 May  
Theme: Easter 6

## Isolation Radio Talk

### Seize the moment, your time is now

Good Morning

In a broadcast made by Prime Minister Winston Churchill late in 1939 he said that Russia behaved like a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. You know what that is like moving now from Easter with its glorious hope, into the wonderful, strange account of the Ascension. What the Ascension means is so much more important than what happened; but what happened has been a real source of inspiration for artists and sculptures throughout history. You do not stop there but move swiftly on to Pentecost; the birthday of the Church; a day of confusion and noise. They said the disciples were all drunk; Peter rises from the ashes of his own betrayal to assume the leadership of the new Church. You? You pause for breath and settle down on the rock; the enigma; the Trinity.

It would be strange indeed if the family of God, the Church, when you meet to set Christ at the centre of your lives you do not bring your turning points, the events that mark crisis and change in life's journey. It may be especially true when you mark birth and marriage and death; when you work at the issues of war and peace, wealth and poverty, love, laughter, tears. If you do not bring these, you forfeit the claim that your faith is about incarnation and epiphany – God with us.

Start with the resurrection; Christ is risen from the dead, you say; it is the hope by which a Christian knows that all that separates and destroys is overcome by what unites and renews. An Easter faith brings into the present a vision of living in a new community. For some it is simply an ecclesiastical high; for others it is nothing more than a public holiday. If surveys are to be believed many today know nothing of the meaning of Resurrection; it is, they say, beyond their experience.

You might think Resurrection belongs to the past or the future, not the present; to Palestine around 33 CE; or to life after death. The Christian faith tells it differently; it says Resurrection is about now. Jesus came to the disciples after his Resurrection; they *knew* him then, they *know* him now, in the breaking of bread. It is neither in the past nor in the future; it is in the present, in scripture, in your prayers; in the sacraments of bread and wine; in the way you are with one another and with your neighbour; that is where Jesus is today.

You know you are now among a people who care little for the things of God. There is a strong political and secular tide running that denies God. You must discover God, just as the Hebrew exiles did when they were taken captive into Babylon. We have their lament in a Psalm: 'How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?' (Psalm 137.4)

What is it like to be a Christian in England in 2021? Now that Europe is gone from us, the struggle for the soul of our nation remains. A significant factor is the missionary rise of other world faiths. There are now living in Britain more followers of Islam, than Methodists and Baptists put together. Southall in West London is reckoned as the capital of the Sikh community outside India, Leicester, next to Durban in South Africa, the largest Hindu city outside India.

Irreversibly and increasingly you, Christian sisters and brothers, must ask what that means; then to discover God in amazing places. Now, just as it has never been, is not the time to demand an ever-purer faith and reject those who do not conform. That is not the way of our Church; it is not the way of God. Always you allow for the glory of God, greater than dogmas, theologies, and ways of worshipping, to point the way, to God.

And although Christianity does have a specific world view, it should seek to mediate between other opposing belief systems so that people are aware of their *common* humanity. When it comes to it, I am not sure it matters what we name God or where we worship. There is only one, interdependent human family and we are born, I think, for goodness, to love unconditionally - and free from prejudice. There is greater *commonality* in our belief systems than we tend to credit; call it a golden thread. It has become known as the Golden Rule to, 'treat others as you would like others to treat you'. I think Christian Scripture deepens this to "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12.31).

The chilly blast of secular society has succeeded in largely uncoupling the Gospel and faith from every area of human life. One reason might be when the Church makes an exclusive claim to the sacred mystery of God. Another, is sadly that human beings have a long history of rationalising acts of inhumanity on the basis of their own interpretations of the will of God. I share a conviction that God acts as easily outside the walls of the Church, as God does inside it; real encounter will take place in the market square, in the home and in chance conversation; surely that must be the case.

The Lordship of Christ is the issue; his strength is both hidden and present, 'If I can only touch the hem of his garment I shall be cured' said that woman in the crowd (Matthew 9.21). You try to touch that hem now, not knowing, but believing. Immerse yourself then, in the ordinary stuff of life; out in the world you will find Christ; in your neighbour you will meet him; in the political and social process you will meet him. He remains elusive, unpredictable; free and wonderful.

Religion is not dead. There is evidence of deep spiritual longing, especially in the young; but religion has become privatised, and the voice of the Church is only at the margins. Notions of society or community give way to the 'individual'. Christians may be convicted of worshipping the idol of religion and you must beware not to project a bleak prognosis of unhappiness and despair. The world looks in strange directions and presently it has quite a Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) feel about it. If God is depended on only when human power is at its weakest or most vulnerable, people will be at their most religious, when they are most exhausted and defeated.

They will also be at their most self-serving and need to be released from the worship of religion itself and its buildings, rather than the worship of God. I have spent much of my ministry encouraging individuals to take hold of life; to know that they are already forgiven and to release them from the burden, real or imagined, of guilt and sin and shame. Jesus seems to have regarded a person's life and health and happiness as a blessing. That is because *all* life belongs to the Creator, his Father's kingdom. If faith means sharing Jesus' attitudes, you can do no less.

Your pastoral strategies are of great importance. Each of you is called to *flower* where you are now. You know that the Kingdom of God dawned with the coming of Christ. There are clues and signs of that kingdom; he told of it in parable; he acted it out in his own compassionate life; in the end, he gave his life, that the kingdom could be yours and mine today. To each generation there is the opportunity to realise and to live out Christ's life again. Your time is now, seize the moment.

Thank you for listening

## **Prayer**

Let us pray to the one God, Creator, Word and Spirit,  
that our lives may bear witness to our hope.

God of all time,  
God beyond and behind time;  
may we know what is too late  
and what is too soon.  
May we always recognise the right time  
in the light of your timeless love,  
and seize the moment.  
Amen.

*(Kairos Prayer)*