

Easter 7 Yr A 2020

'They' say that moving house is one of the most stressful things you can do, and I can agree with that, having moved house twice in the last three years. However, moving is also an opportunity. You can make lots of trips to the tip, to get rid of all the unwanted stuff you have accumulated since the last move (for some people that is decades); you can take boxes of stuff to the charity shop – all those books you won't read again, or the clothes you know you will never again fit into; Church Sales and Coffee Mornings are not just social distractions – they are other opportunities to down-size. But moving also means saying goodbye to friends and neighbours, people you might not see again, unless you are only moving locally, so you take with you your regrets, and their regrets too. So, when you move, you take not only your furniture, you take all your emotional baggage with you, the stuff you still need to deal with.

Jesus knows he is about to move house and will leave behind those he has loved, taught, reprimanded, encouraged, and he will leave them at a loss, and full of regrets – so he has promised 'I will not leave you orphaned/bereaved'. He has tried to reassure them that, in some way which they do not yet understand, he will still be with them, even if he is not there. He has prepared them for that future, promising them 'another advocate'.

In today's Gospel reading we meet Jesus as the (first) advocate. In his intimate prayer to his Father, Jesus says 'I am asking on their behalf'. Here is Jesus not in the role of healer, teacher, proclaimer of the kingdom, but

as counsellor, advocate, friend. This is the way he prepares his friends for the stress ahead. All his disciples will have their emotional baggage to deal with – Thomas, his doubt; Peter, his denial, Mary Magdalene, her struggle with moving on – and nearly all of them, their desertion – and Judas his betrayal. But Jesus prays for them all 'because they are Yours'. The moment is coming for Jesus to move house.

Throughout his Gospel, John has shown us a Jesus aware that this moment would come. The recurring noun John uses is 'hour' (Greek *kairos*). At Cana in Galilee, as a wedding guest, his mother tells him the wine has run out, implying he should do something about it. He replies 'My hour has not yet come'. Twice the Temple authorities try to arrest him, but fail 'because his hour had not yet come' (J7.30, 8.20). But from Chapter 12 onwards, the mood, the emphasis, changes. Jesus and his disciples go to Jerusalem for the Passover, and we sense a movement towards closure. When 'some Greeks' ask to see Jesus he says that 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (J12.20ff), and as Jesus and his followers begin their last meal together, John tells us that 'Jesus knew that his hour had come' (J13.1). And so, at the beginning of today's Gospel reading, as he begins his prayer to his Father, Jesus says 'Father, the hour has come'; this is the moment when Jesus will reveal God's salvation and his glory. This is the paradox of John's Gospel. The cross to the Romans is an instrument of torture and an expression of their power. To the Jews, the cross is a symbol of shame, degradation and inglorious death. To John, it is the triumphant and glorious means by which Jesus completes his mission, to

rise from death and, at the Ascension, to re-enter the glory which he has had from all eternity.

On this last Sunday of the Easter season, the Sunday of Ascensiontide, we look both backwards and forwards – like those who move house; backwards to what has happened, forwards to what is to come; backwards to passion, death and resurrection, to appearances, to love and forgiveness and commission – feed my sheep - and to ascension – ‘whilst he was blessing them, he withdrew from them’. But we also look forward – ‘I will send you another advocate’. So, in this in-between time, as we hear again the prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples’ protection, we can claim that prayer for ourselves. He prays for our protection and for a particular purpose – ‘that they be one as we are one’. He doesn’t pray that we may be spared hardship or trouble, he doesn’t pray that we may be abundantly blessed with the material things of this world; he prays that we might be one, as he and his Father are one. Do you find that hard to understand? How can we be one as Jesus and his Father are one? And what does that mean? John has told us at the beginning of his Gospel – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God, and the Word was God’. Distinct, separate and yet united. A mystery. And yet not a mystery. We can all feel the presence of God in our lives, in worship, in Bible Study, in pastoral care, in prayer, in political action, in the neighbours who do messages for us and those who clap for carers – moments when we feel one with God. But one with one another? Jesus, fully human and also fully divine, prays to his Father that we may be one. That doesn’t mean we all have to be the

same. But it does mean we should all be seeking the Kingdom of God, in whatever way we can, whilst recognising that other people may have different but equally valid ways of treading the path of that search for the Kingdom. Just as the disciples came together, with the women and with Mary and the brothers of Jesus to devote themselves to prayer as they waited for the advocate, we, whether we consider ourselves disciples, the women or the family of Jesus, need to join together (spiritually if not physically at this time of lock down) – we need to join together in prayer – joyful prayer – for the world for which Christ died. And the God to whom we pray, the Father of our Lord, to whom he has just returned in glory, will judge us not with wrath or vengeance, but with love and mercy, for Jesus takes his humanity into the Godhead, wounds and all.

On the day before he died, Jesus asked his Father to protect us. Now, sitting at God’s right hand, he intercedes for us – as a bridge between earth and heaven. Knowing this, our work for the Kingdom, like Jesus’, should be confident, enthusiastic, vigorous, but gentle, compassionate, just and merciful, as our Father in heaven is gentle, compassionate, just and merciful, so that our service in and for God reflects the divine nature. Every moment for us could be a ‘*kairos*’ moment – each moment could be the moment, when we open our hearts, minds, lives to the service of God and we could say ‘Now the hour has come’, now is the hour for me, now is the time to