

**Fifth Sunday of Easter 2017**

**Acts 7: 5 – end; John 14: 1- 14**

The Gospel reading we've just heard proclaimed – or, at least, the first half of it - is one of the most popular readings that is read at funerals. We read it week in and week out. And we do so because it gives absolute reassurance that death is not the end. If we commend our loved ones to God through Jesus, then there is no need for our hearts to be troubled.

We will of course grieve: to do otherwise would be a betrayal of the love we have shared. When someone we love dies it is agony and our hearts are broken with grief. We shouldn't want to deny that. To tell you the truth I'm always a bit suspicious when bereaved families tell me that they want a funeral to be an upbeat celebration and everyone is to wear brightly coloured clothes. I wonder who they're trying to kid; and I fear they're trying to kid themselves because they can't handle their grief. But grief is good. And our

prayer should be not that grief be eliminated, but rather that God might support us in our grief.

But even though we grieve, our hearts need not be troubled about the destination of our loved ones. If we believe in heaven as a physical location, we are assured that a place is waiting there prepared for the person we offer through Jesus. Even if we don't think of heaven as a physical location because God is bigger than, or outside of the realm of time and space, we are still reassured that our loved ones are secure in a sort of place that is beyond the limits of our experience or imagination. Christians believe in life everlasting. The Gospel we've just heard proclaimed is one of the reasons why.

But the message of this Gospel is about more than life after death. It is also about a way of living in the here and now. Jesus says "I am the way . . ." This, of course, is from St.John's Gospel; but 'the way' is a term we're much more used to hearing in St.Mark's

Gospel. Jesus' disciples, both in his earthly lifetime and now, are people who are following the way of Jesus and living in the way of Jesus. We are on the journey of our lives with Jesus. So, whilst one aspect of Christian belief undeniably is about life after death, it diminishes what Christianity is all about and flattens it out if we just look upon it as whether or not you've got the right ticket for when you get to the pearly gates.

I was once in a discussion group and we were asked what was important to us about our Christian faith. One person said it was important to her because it meant that she knew that when she dies she will go to heaven. Well, I know that I shouldn't be judgmental and I ought to make confession when I am; so let me confess now that I thought that was a really poor answer. It wasn't a wrong answer – our faith does assure us of life everlasting – but it was an insufficient answer. I noted, by the way, that my friend looked equally bemused when I said my faith was important

because it helped inform all my decisions, all the way from how and where I earn my living, right down to what sort of instant coffee I buy. And the rub is in how it pays out in the really trivial things in life. I can't see what all this big talk about salvation is worth if you can't be bothered to buy fairly traded coffee.

Christianity is a way of living that leads into truth and life. And we know from last week's Gospel reading the sort of life the way of Jesus leads to: abundant life; life with all its sensations and sensibilities heightened, whether that be in terms of feeling love and compassion, of pursuing justice and peace, of appreciating of the majesty of nature, or having our hearts unlocked to the truth that is borne to us through music or literature or art. Our spiritual well-being is dependent on being alive to all these things. And Christian ministry is incomplete unless it feeds them.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

So, being a Christian is about values and principles, choices and commitments. And we go on working out those values and principles and making those choices and commitments all our lives. It's an ongoing work in progress, travelling in the Way, with Jesus. And that means that whether or not we vote in the forthcoming General Election, how we choose to exercise that vote, is a matter of Christian discipleship. Supporting Christian Aid, both by filling in the envelopes for Christian Aid week, and by engaging in the issue Christian Aid champions, is a matter of Christian discipleship. Opening up our hearts and opening up our communities to strangers in need is matter of Christian discipleship.

Of course, living the way to which following Jesus leads is not a way of life lived exclusively by those who are following Jesus. We meet people every day whose hearts are bursting with love and compassion, who rage with a hunger for justice, and who are transported to beyond their material existence through music and

literature and art. There is a temptation to read this passage as if it is promising the one and only exclusive path to God. All it is saying is that those who are trying to live the Christian life must so by following the way of Jesus. It is not for us to judge others; just to decide whether or not we are going to respond to the call Jesus makes on our lives.

Amen.