

## Reflections for Sunday, 24 May 2020

1 Peter 4: 12-14; 5: 6-11

John 17: 1-11

Jesus Prays for us.

Some Good Advice. (But it's never been much use to me!)

“Don't worry.”

As you can see the Bible readings for today are all about re-assurance. They are chosen for the Sunday after what is commonly called “The Ascension of Jesus.” I find the idea of exaltation more helpful now that we are aware of not living in a three-decker universe, the waters under the earth, the earth and the heavens above the earth. Yuri Gagarin commented that he did not see God when he circled the earth, which says more about him than it says about God or about the life of faith. The exaltation of Jesus seems to me to be the ultimate affirmation of Jesus, there are others in his story.

Paradoxically, they speak to me of his humanity; even he needed reassurance at critical times in his life.

Jesus needed to be reassured about his mission and about his persona. I find that my story has been punctuated by songs from the various era through which I have travelled these four score years. A song that comes to mind is from my childhood; at the same time banal and profound. “Why worry, worry gets you nowhere at all.” If only. I am one of life's worriers and I know that what the songwriter is trying to say is absolutely true. Worry weakens me to face the anticipated and it spoils the enjoyment of the present. Jesus had something, so simple and yet so profound; to say about worry but you can look that up for yourself! Matthew 6: 25 – 34, Luke 10: 41, Luke 12: 11, Luke 12: 22, Luke 12: 25.

I imagine that, being truly human, he was also preaching to himself.

We can't stop worrying in spite of all the sages. Sick people are avoiding going for treatment in case they catch Covid 19. Many of us have not seen the inside of a supermarket, (Hurray) for a couple of months and this is the reason that sick people are not seeing their doctor or are not reporting into A & E departments. Peter's letter is an attempt to reassure early Christians, who

were being persecuted to death. "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert."

Many of the faith songs of the Church, offer re-assurance. As a child I went to a church where we sang the "Venite" every Sunday morning. The words are a recital of the saving acts of God, as is today's Psalm, (Psalm 68: 1 - 10, 32 - 35) and the best known of the Psalms, 23, majors on reassurance without once using the word worry.

I'm not going to be stupid enough to tell you not to worry because I know you won't trust me on that. However, the message for today is one we have heard many times before, some how or another, one way or another, "you will be safe."

Today is the "conversion" day of John Wesley. The day on which he wrote and spoke of "feeling his heart strangely warmed." It was this experience that gave him the insight and courage to speak of what he called, "The Doctrine of Assurance." The experience of the forgiveness, the grace, the peace and the love of God.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

This is an early version of the "Conversion Hymn". You can find the hymn as we now know it at 454 in Singing the Faith

Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
A brand plucked from eternal fire,  
How shall I equal triumphs raise,  
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?

O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which Thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God,  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
Blessed with this antepast of heaven!

And shall I slight my Father's love?  
Or basely fear His gifts to own?  
Unmindful of His favors prove?  
Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,  
Refuse His righteousness to impart,  
By hiding it within my heart?

No! though the ancient dragon rage,  
And call forth all his host to war,  
Though earth's self-righteous sons engage  
Them and their god alike I dare;  
Jesus, the sinner's friend, proclaim;  
Jesus, to sinners still the same.

Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!  
He spreads His arms to embrace you all;  
Sinners alone His grace receives;  
No need of Him the righteous have;  
He came the lost to seek and save.

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
Groaning beneath your load of sin,  
His bleeding heart shall make you room,  
His open side shall take you in;  
He calls you now, invites you home;  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!

For you the purple current flowed  
In pardons from His wounded side,  
Languished for you the eternal God,  
For you the Prince of glory died:  
Believe, and all your sin's forgiven;  
Only believe, and yours is Heaven!

Another Hymn: Christ is alive! Let Christians sing (STF 297)

Prayer

God, whose love is all encompassing, in space and time.

High above heights, deep beyond all depths.

Wider than the vastness of galaxies.

More enduring than time.

Encompassing the highs and lows of existence

And, clothed in one man, entering all human living;

We ask one thing, to know your presence at the core of our being.

In the name of the living, dying, risen, exalted Christ. **Amen**

Rev. Ivor Sperring