

# Easter 6 Year A 2020

Some people already know about it, but I knew it was a mistake the moment I bit into the pork crackling on Monday! Needless to say, a chunk of tooth fell off leaving me with a jagged edge next to my tongue! A call to the dentist, and a visit to collect an emergency repair kit hanging from the door handle of the surgery. An emery board was included which I had to use on the jagged edge, and some filling – so I am now a dentist – except, of course the temporary filling I pushed in with my own fair hands fell out on Thursday! Please don't think too badly of me if you are vegetarian or vegan – pork crackling is now off the menu for the Vicar! The tooth doesn't hurt, so that is a blessing!

It's funny that the current situation has brought into focus so many aspects of our lives into sharp focus - the things we all took for granted, quite apart from a visit to the dentist. Many will have felt blessed at this great slowdown in life; rejoicing in having seen Spring happening before their eyes; giving thank for the quietude forced on an ever-busy humanity; the chance to hear birds sing and bees buzzing. Others will not feel such contentment. We all know people who are struggling in many ways, and then of course there is the pandemic itself, with so many families affected or grieving.

We have travelled through most of this period within the Easter season. Yet it has been an Eastertide like no other, particularly in the way we are separated from members of our families, friends, and community. The season of Alleluias has been one where the sense of our mortality has been placed firmly before us and this seems at odds with the message at the heart of this greatest of festival.

I popped into church this week to fetch something and went to light a candle for the parish on our prayer tree. My eye was caught the desert scene created by our children at the start of Lent. If you remember, it is near the north door and has desert creatures they made of plasticine on a bed of sand. I do not know who supplied the real cacti, but I am pleased to report that they look fine! I suppose one might say that the desert experience of Lent has in some ways continued into Easter because of the Pandemic. Yet we know that Jesus himself needed that period in the desert to prepare for his engagement with the world. His desert experience enabled him to draw humanity to a new understanding of hope- a new Spring.

The Readings of Eastertide have gradually moved from rejoicing in the Risen Life of the Lord towards thinking about the season's culmination at Pentecost. This journey is a call for us to consider the fulness of our lives in Christ; understanding the boundless love at the heart of our Trinitarian Faith. In our Gospel reading today we find ourselves again at the Last Supper. This is a reminder to us that the fulness of our Faith is only brought about through the crucifixion of Jesus, which allows us to reflect and understand these words and the profound teaching he offers in the context of his self-giving love for humanity. He meets us in our own deserts and offers us the vivifying grace of the true light which he brings to the human heart. John, of course has used the imagery of light from the start of the Gospel, but here, around the table with his disciples, as darkness take over, Jesus tells us of another gift beyond compare – one which is also a running theme for John, the Gospel writer.

*'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.'* The Advocate – the actual Greek word gives us the word 'Paraclete' which means 'To be alongside.' We are not to see this concept as related to legality (the original understanding in Ancient Greece), although perhaps we might say that the disciples have been on trial to see if they are up to the job of proclaiming the Gospel. What Jesus actually offers us is the knowledge of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit within our lives – the Holy Paraclete - who leads us to witness to the truth found in Jesus; a truth present both within our communal lives as the Church, but also the inner presence or 'fire of love' within each of us. In this we experience the Holy Spirit both as friend, and through those many other facets Christians have discovered within their lives: advocate, mediator, comforter, councillor; all signs of the indwelling presence of God – the very fire of Divine Love.

Ascension Day reveals the necessity on the part of the disciples in letting go of the Risen Lord. In doing so they are led to the knowledge of the constancy of the Paraclete within their lives – their friend and guide. And the Paraclete draws them to know that Jesus still walks with them as they find the words to draw others to the knowledge of the fulness of life itself. Because of their letting go, we are here today worshipping God, and finding that in the deserts of our own lives, we, through the Holy Spirit, also know the one in *whom we live, and move, and have our being.*

Our Faith is not an escape into fantasy with the attendant hope that everything will get better tomorrow. It is the gritty reality of knowing that Jesus has experienced all that is thrown at us, but that he leads us through the desert so that we may grow spiritually. The constancy of the Holy Spirit within our lives draws us to know Jesus ever *more clearly, to love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.* In seeking this, we come to know the true life found in him; and to draw others to find that the deserts of their own fears are also merely a passage to this fulness of Hope found in Jesus Christ - the one, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, walks beside us every step of our journey.



### Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

### 1 Peter 3: 13-22

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### John: 14: 15-21

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

