

John 14. 15-21; Acts 17.22-31; 1 Peter 3.13-end  
8 & 10 a.m. on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2017  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter at St. Andrew's Totteridge

*May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*

The final Sunday of the ever-joyful Easter season. From Thursday, when we have AD Janet coming to preach for us at our 7:30 pm Ascension Day service (with fireworks, coffee & Tiramisu!). We then enter 'Ascensiontide', which lasts until Pentecost, or Whit Sunday as it used to be known, on the 4<sup>th</sup> June, when the fire of the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples.

Ascensiontide is traditionally a time for prayer as we await the coming of the 'Advocate', the 'Comforter', or the 'Spirit of Truth' as the Holy Spirit is sometimes called. Our Archbishops of Canterbury & York have urged the national church to use this time between Ascension & Pentecost to join a global wave of prayer especially focused that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, people may come to know Jesus Christ for who he is.

This Sunday's readings invite us to go deeper into the mystery St. John introduced last Sunday, about what it meant for Jesus to be with his followers, and also not with them. 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (14.6). Today John continues in that vein, as Jesus explains what today's Collect describes as his 'continual presence' means for those who love him.

He's already spoken to the disciples of his unity with the Father (14.11); out of this will come the Spirit of Truth by the route of paradox, that only through the physical absence of Jesus can the powerful presence of the Spirit draw them into a new kind of knowledge. A knowledge that isn't evidence-based, but dependent on a deeper encounter with the love of the Father and the Son. Far from being orphans, they'll find themselves part of a relationship closer than anything else they've ever experienced.

St. John's gospel is all about the love of God revealed in Christ. God has created us out of his love, by his love, and for his love. He wants us to love him as much as he loves us, but we are not forced to do this. The Christian way is all about love rather than obeying the letter of the law – important though that is. We are supposed to act out of love – and certainly not out of anger, impatience, intolerance, frustration or fear. If we do not love, we are unlikely to be able to walk in the ways of God. Devotion comes before obedience (David Adam). This is what Jesus means when he says, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.'

That's what that marvelous African Saint, Augustine of Hippo, meant when he said, 'Love God and do what you will' – because he knew that in the truth of our love for God we would prefer not to offend him or cause him sorrow. We cannot say truly say we love a person if we cause them constant grief or anxiety.

If we are inconsiderate or unkind towards someone then we do not truly love them. If we use or abuse someone for our own ends and are with them for what we can get out of them, then that is not love. We should not take even the love of our loved ones for granted. Love demands sensitivity, a willingness to give and even a willingness to serve.

Service and obedience become ‘perfect freedom’ because we do them out of love. We see loving service like this between parents and their children, in the unconditional sacrifices they make for each other – so easy to take for granted. But love is never something you just do on your own – it’s God’s gift of himself to us that enables us to show as much love as we can.

It’s only when selfishness gets in the way that God is denied. In focusing on love before law, Christ introduced a radical new priority. Instead of living by the kind of knowledge which must always take precautions against what it does not know, we are offered a God who wants to be known closely by human beings.

I’m suggesting that in giving life to humanity, perhaps this God went as far as to instil a longing for relationship, so that those who reached out for him could discover that he was very near – so near that they were actually living within the being of God (B. Nichols). As Alfred Lord Tennyson put it so well,

*Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet –  
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.*

## **John 14. 15-21     The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

15 ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

<sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. <sup>17</sup>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.

18 ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

<sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>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.’

## 1 Peter 3.13-end

13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup>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, <sup>15</sup>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; <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## Acts 17.22-31

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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, <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>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, <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>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." <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>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.'

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