

SPRING REFLECTIONS



ST SAVIOUR'S RETFORD

Introduction from Rev Ben Clayton

These reflections are based on talks from the recent online services we have held. We don't want anyone from St Saviour's to miss out, so we hope having them in this format can provide you with some encouragement and help us to stay united as a church family.

As the Covid-19 lockdown begins to be eased we may slowly be able to meet publicly again. We may have different thoughts and feelings about this: some will long to meet as soon as possible, others may feel more cautious. Whatever happens, St Saviour's is likely to look different for some time to come as coming out of lockdown will probably be a slow and phased process. As government and church guidance is released it may take time for it to be examined in consultation with church wardens and PCC as we work out if, when and how best to implement it at St Saviour's. Different churches may take different approaches depending on their context, resources and tradition. We will seek to do what is best for everyone at St Saviour's whilst following the advice, keeping everyone safe and seeking to help everyone to continue to connect with God and each other as best we can. I know it is frustrating, so I'm grateful for your patience as we try to navigate this together.

As we continue to watch and wait to see how things unfold I hope and pray that these reflections can point you to the comfort and peace that only God can provide.

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
(Psalm 46:1, NIV)

Yours prayerfully,

Ben Clayton



St Saviour's Retford

Contact Details

If you need help, support or information please contact us.

Vicar

Rev Ben Clayton: btclayton@live.co.uk or
01777 704211

Curate

Rev Ben Marston: benjaminymarston@gmail.com or 01777 472659

Churchwardens

Martin Dawson: chezdawson@rocketmail.com or 01777 703121
Steve Bartle: shbartle@outlook.com or 01777 708463

Deputy Churchwarden

Ali Barnett: alisonbarnett11@gmail.com or 01777 701865
Barbara Newbold: newbold.johnsky.com@hotmail.com or 01777 702003

Safeguarding Co-ordinator & Lead Recruiter

Barbara Moakes: barbara.moakes@yahoo.com or 077681 59844



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REFLECTION 1 - THE KING ARRIVES

Read Matthew 21:1-11

One of the most important questions we can ask as humans is about identity - who is this? It is a question that comes up in this reading (v.10), and is in all of the Gospels - who is Jesus?

On the one hand, Jesus seems to confirm what people had started to believe about him.

Jesus is just outside Jerusalem and he asks two disciples to go and collect a donkey and her young colt (v.1). Jesus isn't putting his feet up for the final few miles into Jerusalem! This is a deliberate decision to confirm that He is the long hoped for King of Israel.

Matthew points us to a prophecy from the Old Testament (v. 5) which would have been well known at the time. It said that when God sent someone to fix the world, then this person would come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

By sitting on this donkey and heading down the hill into Jerusalem at festival time Jesus is making it clear that; 'Yes, the King you've been waiting for, it's me'.

And the crowd get it! They give him the red-carpet treatment and the things they shout are exactly the things you would shout for a king.

Or do they? The crowd see that Jesus is a king, but as we discover Jesus is not that sort of King. Jesus is not the kind of king anyone expected. His crown will not be one of gold, but of thorns.

Jesus is not the victorious and triumphant king the crowds wanted either. To deal with the root of the problem that stopped people being who they were meant to be would take something unexpected. God himself would need to take on sin, suffering and sorrow and defeat it. God himself would need to die.

We all have things we would like God to fix in us and our world, but Jesus will not just deal with surface issues. He won't simply re-seal the road and cover the cracks. This king is out to deal with the root of the problem. That requires Him to dig up the road completely and re-build it from the bedrock to become a new and glorious highway.

This king is not here to engage in quick fixes. He will challenge us deeply, in ways we never expected or perhaps wanted. But He does so that we can experience the wholeness only he brings. The crowd hailed Jesus as King. They were right to do so. But for this king to fix the world it would require His death. Nothing less would fix the world. Nothing less would fix me or you.

Jesus is King. If we welcome him wholeheartedly, he will confirm and confound our expectations. Wonderfully, beautifully so.

For Reflection and Prayer

- How does King Jesus challenge the things I think are important?

Church's Prayer for Palm Sunday

True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory.
Amen.

REFLECTION 2 - A PICTURE OF THE CROSS

Read John 13:1-17

Jesus washing the disciples feet isn't simply an act which shows us how incredibly humble Jesus was, as he takes the role of the servant and washes his disciples sweaty, dusty, stinky feet. The context shows us it's a picture of what Jesus is going to do at the cross. Verse 1 reminds us it's Passover time when Israel remembered how God rescued them from Egypt through the sacrifice of a lamb and Jesus does all this knowing his "hour had come." In John's gospel Jesus' hour is used to refer to the cross. In this remarkable foot washing then we have a picture that reveals something of what Jesus' sacrifice at the cross means.

The cross is about ***Jesus' love for us***. At the heart of sacrifice is love and at the heart of love is sacrifice. We've seen that in recent months as we've sacrificed physical contact to protect the ones we love or witnessed the dedicated health workers sacrificing their safety to try and save the sick. The cross is the ultimate act of love, because it is the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus has seen and loved his disciples and despite their faults and failings and knowing they are all about to abandon him at his moment of greatest need He loves them enough to give his life for them. He does the same for us.

The cross is about ***Jesus showing us his power***. Jesus knows he has all the power his heavenly Father can give (v.3) and yet he doesn't ask his disciples to form a queue so he can sign autographs. Instead he bends down and serves them. True power is not to be lauded over others. True power is given to serve others. The cross is the real path to glory and greatness. A person might have money, prestige and influence, property and flash cars. But the one who follows in the path of the cross has God's power and uses it not for their own sake, but for the sake of others.

The cross is about ***Jesus washing us clean***. That's the obvious parallel. Jesus washes his disciples feet, because through the cross he can wash us clean. It takes more than just soap and water to

clean up the mess in each of our hearts that stands between us and God, but Jesus willingly sheds his blood, so we can be washed clean. When we look to Jesus and trust in what he has done at the cross then we are washed clean completely (v.8). But to be washed clean and made a friend of Jesus doesn't make us perfect. We continue to make mistakes and mess up each day. But we can always look back to the cross and receive again and again the forgiveness we need from God (v.10).

So how will you respond to the washing that Jesus offers you at the cross? It's hard isn't it? Hard to admit that we are messy and that the mess can't be covered by our own efforts, but needs the cross of Jesus. Jesus bends down and offers to wash us clean. Will you let him? When we do then we are free to serve others as he served his friends; not from a place of need or with anything to prove, but from a place of being securely loved by God, so that we can truly love others.

For reflection and prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.
Amen.

REFLECTION 3 - REAL & PERSONAL

Read John 20:1-18

Again and again the accounts of the resurrection in the gospels are not described like myth and legend, but as the eyewitness accounts of something extraordinary. We are presented with evidence of the empty tomb, the absence of a corpse, the unlikely nature of the witnesses - in those days women's testimony was not trusted and the disciples were despondent and scared in no position to make up tales of resurrection. Not to mention the kind of encounters people had with the risen Jesus, touching him, eating with him and the extraordinary commitment of his followers to tell everyone what had happened despite being arrested and beaten for sharing it. The evidence points to the resurrection being *real*. Chuck Colson an advisor to President Nixon sums it up well:

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They wouldn't have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world - and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

In John chapter 20 it's not just the reality of the resurrection that shines through it's that it's *personal*.

We see this with Mary's encounter with Jesus. Presumably she has come back to the tomb later to try and make sense of everything. She's still empty and sad, even angels don't seem to help her.

She just keeps asking where have they put Jesus. Finally she turns to the man she assumes is the graveyard gardener and asks the same question. Then Jesus just says "Mary" and everything is changed. Her heart leaps as she realises for herself that it's true. The tomb is empty because Jesus is alive. She can barely let go of Jesus. Jesus has to urge her to go and tell the others and that

encounter with Jesus fills her so full that she leaves overflowing with the good news that Jesus is risen.

It is an encounter that raises a question for each one of us. Is the resurrection real for us? Is the resurrection personal for you? We often know the importance of understanding Jesus died for us so we can be forgiven, but do we talk enough about how Jesus rose again for us? How we need not only to trust in Jesus dying for us, but trust in Jesus resurrection. That he came back to life for you, so he could offer you his life. A life that verse 17 describes as being a child of God known and loved by a perfect heavenly Father, now and forever beyond even death.

Why not receive that life afresh today and let the risen Jesus fill your emptiness with his life. Because the resurrection is real - Jesus is alive and it's personal - he rose again so that we can enjoy his life now and forever. Let's go and tell the world.

For reflection and prayer

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

REFLECTION 4 - PEACE

Read John 20:19-31

We see in this Bible reading that the Risen Jesus brings peace to those who believe in him.

What kind of peace does Jesus offer us?

Jesus comes to his disciples following his resurrection and greets them with peace. This isn't the kind of peace you might find in a holiday brochure - sandy beaches, warm weather and cool drinks! It is a deeper kind of peace based on what Jesus has done.

Jesus shows the disciples his wounds (v. 20) to prove it was him, and to remind them of all he had done. In his death and resurrection despair, darkness and death have been tackled and the sting drawn from them.

The peace that Jesus gives comes from knowing that, when we follow him, we do not have to face God's punishment for the wrong things we have done, and that death will not have the last laugh over us. In Jesus we can have peace because he gives us new life that begins now and goes on forever.

What kind of belief does Jesus invite in us?

Thomas is sometimes known as *doubting* Thomas - but this is a bit unfair. He wasn't there when Jesus first appeared and struggled to believe that Jesus was really risen. It is only when he sees Jesus a week later, and is invited to touch Jesus' wounds, that Thomas makes this remarkable confession: '*My Lord and My God*' (v. 28). Jesus treats Thomas' scepticism with respect, he invites Thomas to touch his wounds, but also gently challenges Thomas to believe in him. He does the same with us.

Jesus does not expect blind faith from us. God is not at all interested in playing 'hide and seek' or making it more difficult to believe. Jesus treats our questions with respect. He does not force himself on us. But he does call us to deeper trust in him.

If we are to enjoy the peace that comes from Jesus, we cannot stay in a permanent state of doubt. We need to get off the fence!

So how do we move from doubt to trust in Jesus and enjoy the peace that comes from him?

As we read the Bible daily, ask questions of it, and allow it to ask questions of us, that is how we will see who Jesus is (v. 30-31). As we read the Bible, we have the opportunity to go through something like the process Thomas did. We don't see Jesus face to face, but as we read and bring our questions to him, he meets us and calls us to growing faith in him.

For Reflection and Prayer

- What specific things can I do to remind myself of the peace I have in Jesus?

Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts,
that we may seek the good of others
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,
to the praise of God the Father.
Amen

REFLECTION 5 - MEETING THE RISEN JESUS

Read John 21

What does following the Risen Jesus look like?

It looks like ***Jesus entering the everyday to transform it***. Jesus could have met his friends when they were praying together or at the synagogue, but instead he meets them doing something simple and ordinary. He meets them when they are fishing, but then he transforms their ordinary everyday task into something extraordinary as their boat overflows with their miraculous catch. He does the same for us. However boring or mundane things might be, Jesus meets us where we are and he offers to come in, draw close to us and transform us.

It looks like ***Jesus being a friend of failures***. We see this in verses 15-19. In our minds eye we are to flashback to the night of Jesus' betrayal. Peter is standing by another campfire being asked three times whether he is a friend of Jesus. Three times he insists that he's not. Now before another campfire three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him and three times Peter insists that he does. Jesus is forgiving Peter's failure. We know Jesus loves Peter, he's gone to the cross to show it. But Jesus doesn't require Peter to be or do anything special, he just wants to know if Peter loves him, because Jesus is a friend of failures. His friendship transforms Peter from a failure to a faithful leader. Despite our failings his friendship can transform us as well.

It looks like ***following Jesus as individuals***. That doesn't mean we follow Jesus alone - far from it. But as soon as Peter is called by Jesus and hears of the challenges he will face in following him he looks round to compare himself. Jesus explains that he has called Peter with his particular gifts and talents to one thing. He may call others to different things, but that is Jesus' choice. We need not be tempted then to look around at others and think I need to be more like them to be a really "good" Christian. Of course the examples of others can sometimes be helpful, but we are first and foremost called to follow Jesus. He alone is the Risen King. So we

need not worry if Alex is more gifted at this or Jo more talented at that. But simply fix our eyes and our hearts on Jesus and seek to follow him. Let Jesus transform us and change us into the person he has made us to be.

What might that look like?

Well Peter provides us with a picture of what it can look like when he's stood in that boat and he realises he can see the risen Jesus. Peter can't wait to spend time with his friend, so he jumps into the water and swims to shore to get to him first, despite all his failures and mistakes. Like an excited school child who's seen his dad for the first time in a week, or a lover who is reunited with their beloved after time away at sea, or perhaps how we'll feel when we can hug our friends after lockdown.

Peter just has to get to Jesus. He wants him in his everyday life. He needs Jesus to transform his failures and Peter longs to answer the call to follow him.

For reflection and prayer

- What everyday part of your life do you want to ask Jesus to enter today?

Risen Christ,
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life
and fill us with your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen

REFLECTION 6 - PSALMS IN THE WILDERNESS - UNDER PRESSURE

Read Psalm 59

Psalm headings (which are a footnote in some translations) are part of the original text and often give insight into the situation the Psalm was written for. Psalm 59 says “A Psalm by David, after Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him” (GNT).

David is now a successful military leader and has been anointed as God’s new choice of King after Saul failed to follow God. Saul though is still on the throne and becoming increasingly unhinged in the face of David’s success. In 1 Samuel 19:11-12 he sends men to take David out permanently. Psalm 59 describes the men as being like vicious dogs (v.7) prowling around waiting for a chance to get rid of David. David was strong, a great warrior, but instead of taking matters into his own hands, he brings all his anger and fear to God in prayer.

David prays that his enemies would be eliminated (v.5, 13). The words are quite shocking and match the gravity of the emotions that David must have felt in such a frightening situation. It’s not simply a vengeful rant though. The language is vivid - but David is asking for God to treat his enemies with the justice that their murderous actions and attitudes deserve. More than that he is concerned for the future of God’s kingdom. As God’s chosen king David’s fate was linked to all God’s people. His safety and success could impact how God’s people represented the living God to the world and so David’s concern is not simply that he is able to stay safe and the hitmen get taken out, but “that everyone will know that God rules in Israel, that his rule extends over all the earth” (v.13)

Throughout history God’s king has always been opposed. We see it here with David’s enemies lurking at the door. We see it with God’s ultimate King, Jesus. He faced enemies when alone in the wilderness being tempted, questioned in the temple, interrogated by Pilot and the authorities and yet as he hung on the cross he was dying for his enemies and prayed “Father forgive them”.

Jesus, God's ultimate king, won a victory over his enemies by dying for them. His enemies of course are people like me and you, because one way or another by nature we all oppose God. But Jesus' sacrifice means we can be reunited to him and live with him as our good and gracious king. One day his rule will be seen by all and he will rid the world of all wrong and make all things new. He is a king who calls his followers to pray for our enemies and those that persecute them (Matthew 5:44) and who as the judge of all calls us not to take matters into our own hands but to give them over to him (Romans 12:19).

David's emotional prayer then teaches us to be real with God. That when we are wronged, or under pressure, or see others that are we don't need to be afraid to pray what we feel however raw or emotional. In doing so we entrust the situation to God's justice and through the emotional fog we can begin to hear God's call to love and forgive.

David doesn't just pray from his heart for God's justice. He also asks for God's protection again and again (v.1, 9, 16,17). In the turmoil he's facing he seeks shelter in God. He knows God laughs in the face of his enemies (v.8). The men who think they can take on God's king, the evil things at work in this world that think they will win have no chance compared to the living God. Their efforts are a joke to him. The Living God is a God of constant love and he will keep those who take refuge in him safe. That doesn't mean no harm will come. David's life is on the line and he's about to go on the run. But it does mean that in love he will always look after his people. So let us shelter in him.

For reflection and prayer

Stand, O strong and merciful God,
against all oppression
and with all who are oppressed,
against the triumph of evil
and against the complacency of your people;
establish in Jesus Christ
your new order of generosity and joy. Amen

REFLECTION 7 - PSALMS IN THE WILDERNESS - AFRAID

Read Psalm 56

Psalm 56 comes from a time in David's life when he was on the run from King Saul. David had been anointed king by the Prophet Samuel after King Saul had failed in his kingship. David refuses to remove King Saul and is now on the run because Saul sees him as a threat, and wants him dead.

In desperation David hides amongst the Philistines - the family of Goliath, the man David had just killed (1 Samuel 17). Desperate and on the run, this psalm is all about what we do when we feel afraid or anxious.

When I am afraid... I will be honest with God

David tells God how relentlessly under pressure He feels. This is a serious situation and he isn't downplaying it. David knew that he could be honest with God about what was really going on. It is one of the things that is so beautiful about the psalms and why they so naturally can become prayers for us.

Sometimes we think we need to tell God what we think he wants to hear, like a particularly insecure boss. In the rest of our lives, honesty can invite trouble. We are used to being guarded and we bring this to our relationship with God.

Honesty with God is important though, because then he can do something in us and in our anxiety inducing situations. Without honesty, we are simply keeping God at arms-length. As with any relationship, without honesty there can be no intimacy.

The Psalms are an invitation to be honest with God. To tell him what is really going on, and to do so without fear that we're somehow being unchristian. These prayers are in the Bible for us to pray.

When I am afraid... I will learn to trust God

David has to coach himself to trust God because it doesn't come naturally (v.3-4). It is much easier to trust in people or things.

They seem so much more real. David makes a deliberate choice to trust God who has revealed himself in the pages of the Bible.

David comes back to the same words again (v.10-11). Partly because like any good song, his psalm needs a chorus! But it also expresses something of how we come to trust God. We can say we trust God, but we repeatedly find ourselves trusting in other things.

Real trust is placing the weight of our life on God and the things we know about him. That takes time, and we need to keep coming back to these things when we realise that we say we believe, but we're not really living it out.

When I am afraid... I will give thanks to God.

David is convinced of God's care even in the midst of great trouble.

There is an amazing image of God keeping a record of tears (v.8). It is such a tender picture of our heavenly father. God's care is why David can pray like this. He knew God cared for him and God was going to look after him, even in a frightening situation. So, he could pour out his heart in this honest way.

In hard times, it can be difficult to see this, but God really does care for **you**. He counts your tears. He sees what you are going through. He cares for you. What an amazing thing to give thanks for!

For Reflection and Prayer

- How can I grow in honesty with God?
- What has God done for me that I can thank Him for?

Faithful God,
Your deliverance is nearer than we know;
Free us from fear
And help us to find courage in your Word,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

REFLECTION 8 - PSALMS IN THE WILDERNESS -FIGHTING TO SEE

Read Psalm 34

Some years ago my cousin was due to visit and he was driving to my house with his future father-in-law in a snowy blizzard. The windscreen wash on their car was broken, so he had to lean out the window as they were going along with a big cloth to try and get the sleet and muck off the window so they could see. When we are confronted with anxieties and fears - as perhaps we are more so than normal at the moment - it can be like a spiritual blizzard. Clouding our vision of God and we have to try and wipe the sleet and snow off, so we can taste and see that the LORD is good (v.8).

David was facing just such a situation on the run from Saul as he tried to hide amongst the enemy Philistines and then pretended to be mad to escape (read the story in 1 Samuel 21:10-15). Psalm 34 is written to help others in similar difficult situations to lift their eyes and see God clearly.

The psalm is full of helpful verses to address our fear and anxiety. Here are just two observations.

The struggle of prayer

David paints prayer as something that takes effort and commitment. We are to seek God (v.4), look to him (v.5), call to him (v.6), cry out (v.15, 17). It may be a struggle, but when we do look to God we can be assured that he hears and answers our prayers (v.6), delivers us (v.4, 19) and will be a refuge, a place of security and safety (v.8, 22). Above all he will come close to us, even and perhaps especially in the most heart wrenching moments. For “The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (v.18). When we are really up against it we can be reassured of God’s presence with us supporting and helping us. But we may need to fight and wrestle in prayer to see the reality of all that God wants to be for us in times of difficulty.

Living a life of fear

If prayer is to be a fight to see the living God clearly then life is to

be lived in fear. This seems a bit odd. Surely what David needed and we need is to be freed from our fears? But as is so often the case in the Bible, freedom from fear comes not simply by its removal, but by replacing it with a greater fear. A fear of God.

This is not like a fear of spiders, but means recognising the living God is bigger than anything we could face, so with him we have all we need (v.10).

Honouring God in this way begins by getting right with God, joining his family through trusting him (v.9, 11) and then seeking to live his right way, watching our words and actions so that they build up and don't tear down (v.13-14). Ensuring that our lives are centred on God. This can be easier said than done. Sometimes acknowledging God in our fears means coming back to him after we have strayed to seek his forgiveness and ensure he's in the right place in our lives. Of course that doesn't mean fear will magically go away; for some our mental and physical health can mean anxiety is a daily problem. God understands and he calls us to come to him just as we are and seek his face and centre our lives on him. And God doesn't expect us to walk through difficulty alone. We can walk through it together as part of a church family.

But it's also a path that Jesus has walked for us and that he now walks with us on. Jesus alone feared God perfectly, trusting him, loving him. He alone was crushed more greatly than anyone and yet God restored him without a bone being broken. Because of him we can be reassured of God's presence when we are crushed and reassured that when we look to him we will be rescued in the end. If Jesus is at our side we can fight to pray and live to fear our Good God.

For reflection and prayer

Watch over us Loving God,
that on our lips will be found your truth
and in our hearts your love;
In Jesus name. Amen

REFLECTION 9 - PENTECOST - GOD'S POWER & PRESENCE

Read Acts 2:1-13

Following Jesus' ascension, the disciples must have felt confused about what was coming next. They had spent three years following Jesus and hanging on his every word, but in Acts 1 they replace Judas, and that's about it, because Jesus had told them to wait (Acts 1:4). The disciples needed something more. They needed Jesus' ongoing presence and power.

Describing what happened that first Pentecost must have been odd (v.2-4). It was *like* the sound of wind and *like* fire. A powerful sense of God's power and purity. But unlike in the Old Testament where God appeared in this way at a distance, this is something that comes to rest *on* the disciples (v.3). Jesus had dealt with the mess that stops people coming to God and now his followers could experience the power and holiness of God *living in* them.

Followers of Jesus are never completely alone. When we trust in Jesus, God deals with our mess and takes up permanent residence in us - we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

There are times when we can feel terribly lonely, but God lives in followers of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. As we trust in him, we carry his presence in us into the most challenging places. This doesn't mean we won't ever be lonely again, or that we don't need others. God has given us his Spirit, the ongoing presence of Jesus, living in us. We are never completely alone.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was not just a warm fuzzy presence for the disciples. He also changed them. The disciples suddenly started fearlessly telling the incredible story of what Jesus has done, to people from across the world (v.4).

People from Galilee (where most of the disciples were from) were not generally known as particularly cultured. In fact, they tend to be dismissed as country dwelling hicks! Which explains some of the amazement of the crowd at their sudden transformation (v. 7). The

Holy Spirit changed them and enabled them to communicate with people across the barriers of culture and language, with clarity and power, so that what they said provoked wonder and interest (v. 12).

The Holy Spirit is the fuel in the engine of the Christian life. Without him we go nowhere. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's People are never alone when living for him. God is at work in us. We do not need to fake it, or simply try hard, God brings true and lasting change in us.

So what is our role then? Our role is to *allow* God to change us. To invite and go on co-operating with the work of God in us. To '...be filled with the Holy Spirit' or *go on* being filled is another way of putting it (Ephesians 5:18).

As we ask for that power and presence to renew us day by day, God changes us into the kind of people who provoke wonder and interest in what Jesus has done.

These last few months have thrown up lots of questions for us. If we are to face the challenges that lie ahead, we must keep asking for God to fill us with his Spirit. It is as we know his presence and power that we will become the people we are meant to be. People who provoke wonder and interest in all that Jesus has done.

For Reflection and Prayer

- Have I asked the Holy Spirit to assure me of God's Presence and Power today?

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

REFLECTION 10 - THE TRIUNE GOD

Read Matthew 28:16-20

The Bible tells us that Jesus is “the visible likeness of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). So what does Jesus show us about God?

Matthew 28 starts with Jesus being *alive*. Remember he said again and again that he would die and then three days later rise from the dead and that’s exactly what’s happened. He’s done something that surely only God can do, beating even death and now he’s alive for all his followers to see. He’s not just alive he is *worshipped*. Only God is worshipped and so his followers have clearly seen enough to convince them that Jesus is God. Jesus hasn’t forced them into it - it says some doubted and Jesus doesn’t stop them worshipping them. It’s not a mistake. He really is God. He even goes on to talk about having all the authority of heaven and earth, which only God could have. So Jesus is God.

But when Jesus talked about God early on in his life he spoke about God as his Father and himself as God’s Son. He prayed to his Father in heaven when he was clearly God on earth. (e.g. Matthew 11:25-27). He also spoke about the Holy Spirit as on a level with his Father, like in verse 19 “the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” One Name for one God. But three - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All equally God, distinct from one another yet united to one another. Christians have come to call this idea of a multidimensional multi personal God the Trinity. It’s a word that is not in the Bible, but it’s there to help us understand God and protect against wrong thinking about him.

We get windows onto the triune life earlier in Matthew’s Gospel. Take the start of Jesus’ ministry when he is baptised. As Jesus emerges from the water we see the Spirit descend on him like a dove and hear the voice of his Father say “this is my Son whom I love with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17). You get the same pattern in Matthew 17 when Jesus is transfigured on a mountainside. These windows give us a taste of God’s life.

Forever and ever God has been a Father loving, delighting, blessing his Son in the joyful unity of his Spirit. For with Jesus we find not God the policeman laying down the rules, or God the loner hoping for some friends, or God the weirdo who is just a bit boring to be around. We find the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit perfectly united in Love. A God who is an overflowing fountain of joy and life and love. To know this God is to be befriended by beauty, to delight in happiness itself, be loved by love itself. As one person put it: “When we get to know Jesus we are drawn into knowing his Spirit and his Father.” If you are trusting in Jesus, then, you may still be confused about how God can be three in one. But you are already experiencing the Trinity. You are connected to Jesus, his Father is your father and his Spirit is filling you with God’s love.

When it comes to Matthew 28 then we have no need to be sceptical about Jesus’ authority. With a triune God it cannot simply be about control and force, for the Son gave up his authority for the sake of others. He left his home in heaven for us so that we might be welcomed to our true home with his Father. He first suffered before his Father raised him from the dead conquering sin and death to reign over all things. Jesus’ authority then is not about lording it over others, but serving others. His invitation to follow him is an invitation to first be served by him, before we serve him and others

Similarly the call to make disciples is not a call to demand everyone bows the knee in slave-like obedience to God the great dictator. But a call to invite others to experience the life of this God of love. To commit to him in baptism - much as bride and groom commit to each other in marriage. To teach not simply knowledge and information, but how life with this God changes and transforms every area of our lives. Have you discovered the life of this God? Have you committed yourself to him are you letting him transform you day by day? Is he so capturing your heart that you share him with others?

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