

The Upper Culm Valley Mission Community
The Parishes of Hemyock with Culm Davy, Clayhidon and Culmstock

5th May 2024
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Rogation Sunday

Welcome to Worship

Our readings this Sunday remind us to give thanks for what God has given us in his creation and in Jesus who came to show us how to live life to the full and how to extend God's kingdom here on earth.

Collect

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant,
that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Isaiah 55:6-11

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,

and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.
'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection

Revd. John Stone

Today, as well as being the sixth Sunday of Easter is also the Sunday traditionally celebrated as Rogation Sunday. That is the Sunday in the church year when church congregations sometimes process around their villages giving thanks to God for rivers, streams, crops and farm animals, but since this is a Worship Sheet delivered to people's homes either by email or on paper I am going to take a look at Rogationtide celebrations from a slightly different point of view.

In his prophecy Isaiah said, 'For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they

have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.' Isaiah reminds us that God has given us abundant life not only in terms of all the produce of the earth, but also by means of his word. We have that word in the scriptures and as Christians we have that word in the person of Jesus. The word that St John describes in that well known passage right at the beginning of his Gospel. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' We have that word in Jesus who was raised to eternal life and is still with us today. Throughout the Easter season and perhaps especially today on Rogation Sunday we can give thanks to God for Jesus who came to show us what abundant life is really all about.

In one sense it is easy to be a Christian, all you need to do is to believe in Jesus. And up to a point that is true. You cannot be a Christian unless you believe that Jesus was sent from God to be born in Bethlehem, that he was crucified and died in Jerusalem and that he was raised to eternal life and returned to God in heaven. But that only deals with the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly life. But to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy about the Word of God accomplishing its purpose and to be good disciples we also have to take account of what happened in the middle. In his preaching and teaching ministry Jesus left us a set of standards to live by, but he made it as easy as he could. He pointed out to his first disciples that they had not chosen him, but he had chosen them. And he had chosen them to be examples to everyone else about how to obey his command that they were to love one another. Being a disciple is all about love. When Jesus was challenged about which commandment was the greatest, he said it was first to love God and then to love your neighbour as yourself.

That is just as true for us as it was for those first disciples. He has chosen us to be disciples and to show people around us how to live that abundant life that Isaiah was talking about. And it all has to do with love. First, love God, not just

when everything is all sweetness and light, but love God when everything is going wrong and God seems a very long way away; when we don't understand what he is doing or where he is leading us. That isn't easy, but that is when we especially need to thank God for Jesus and his words from the cross. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,' tells us that no matter what we might go through, the separation he suffered from God was far worse. So he understands every difficulty and pain we have, and more.

Then there is love your neighbour as yourself. And that is not always easy either, because as the parable of the Good Samaritan tells us, it is the neighbour that we would least expect to have to love that we have to work at loving. As disciples, it is no good just loving the nice friendly neighbour, the one we get on well with and whose company we enjoy. That is far too easy. We do have to love them of course, but the neighbour we really have to try to love is the one we don't like and who probably doesn't like us either. And the other neighbour God is calling us to love is the one who does not believe what we believe, the one who is not yet a disciple.

It was Archbishop William Temple who defined the Christian Church as one of the very few human organisations that exists for the sake of those who are not yet its members. And the duty of every disciple and the mission of the whole church is to love people into the kingdom of God, so that everyone can experience that abundance of life which we already enjoy. And Rogation Sunday is one of the days in the church year when we give thanks to God for all that we have, for all that we are, and for all that we can do to extend his kingdom here on earth.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Almighty God we thank you for the gift of your Holy Word, may it be a lantern to our feet and a light to our paths. Take us and use us to love and serve all people, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of your Holy Name. Amen.