

Sunday 24th May Sunday after Ascension

Read John 17. 1-11

Reflection

Mark Bee (Ordinand)

There is a strange intensity in our lives at the moment. We are living in challenging times. Do you find it difficult to think what day of the week it is or even month? Time moves at a different pace as our lives had to adapt to Lockdown. How strange that we cannot meet together, or just shop normally or worship together. It is two months since we have been able to celebrate communion together or share the peace. It is still unclear when we will be able to again as a church. Strange intense times indeed.

And so it was for the disciples after Jesus had left them and returned to heaven. They had been with him for over three incredible years of journeys, of healings, miracles and controversy. Then He died a horrible death on the Cross and three days later came back to life. This week the church has celebrated Ascension Day when Jesus was raised in glory to heaven to be with the Father again. What strange and intense times it must have been for them. But Jesus had prepared them for this in our Gospel reading today. Verse 11 says "Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." He had said this to them before his death and it must have been something for them to hold onto as they saw him disappear back to heaven.

At this time our lives may feel ones of separation because of Lockdown. The things we have taken for granted are no longer just open to us. I have found that I am noticing things and appreciating things in a new intense way. I now have the time, space and opportunity to do things I have long put off. My garden is looking much neater, with tender young vegetables growing in the veg patch. My greenhouse is full of plants and organised! My fences have been sprayed with preservative for the first time in nine years....it took a global pandemic for me to get round to that job. I am suddenly being moved deeply by a piece of music on the radio which I may normally not have even notice. An evening walk with my dog at sunset may find me watching the colures fade and noticing Venus shinning down in the western sky. I may have tears in my eyes watching this beauty. Oh to have the time and space to see all of this.... There is so much that we should be thankful for in this beautiful world. And living here in Suffolk it is all around us. Now we have time to see it all properly.

I have also recently re read Revelations of Divine Love by Julian of Norwich. She was a mystic writer and anchoress who died in around 1416 in her hermit cell in Norwich. Hers was a self-imposed Lockdown. She was bricked up with only a window where people would pass her food or bring her their problems for advice. She led an intense life also. An example is her writing about the hazelnut. She takes it in the palm of her hand, closely examines it and notices that even though small and smooth it represented God's whole wonderful creation. It could disintegrate but was protected by the Father. She found great bliss in this fact. Her shrine Church is open in Norwich and worth a visit (when we are all allowed to travel again). By the door there is a basket of hazelnuts, you are invited to take one in your palm to remind you of this revelation of God's love..

So may we look forward confident in the knowledge that we, like the hazelnut are protected by the Father. Even though life is far from normal let us look out for that intensity of living which this time can offer us. May it transform us so that when we can all come together as a church, once again, we can be stronger as the body of Christ . He may have ascended into heaven but we now wait on His return confident in the protection which can only come from the Father. Amen