



Sunday 10th May 2020

Fifth Sunday of Easter

**The Beacon Parishes Mission Community of Ipplepen with Torbryan,
Denbury, Broadhempston and Woodland**

FIRST READING

Acts 7.55-End

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

PSALM

Psalms 31.1-5

Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

SECOND READING

I Peter 2.2-10

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'
To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner',
and
'A stone that makes them stumble,

and a rock that makes them fall.'
They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.
Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

GOSPEL

John 14.1-14

Jesus the Way to the Father

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

A REFLECTION BY REVEREND STEVE SHELDON

My goodness but there is a wealth of inspiration in today's readings. I commend them all to you, and suggest you select a verse or two to focus on and think how you might share your thoughts about it with a friend.

I have picked out two bits to share with you today. The first being the story of St Stephen as found in Acts.

In the beginning the earliest Church was divided in the way that most human societies and cultures become divided. From then to now there are elements of the Church who feel the prophetic call to a more progressive activist way of being. St Stephen, the first Christian martyr was one of those people.

Stephen came from the Greek Jewish community who lived and worshiped away from the central Jewish community in Jerusalem; it was therefore easier for him to see the new Christian community as separate from the traditional conservative Temple-based worship of his ancestors.

Greek Jewish Christians and Hebrew Jewish Christians were dogmatically coming to very different understandings of what Jesus as the Messiah meant, and its implications for worship and behaviour. For Stephen the Temple had outlived its usefulness and the Law of Moses had to be seen in a new and different light. This was dangerous thinking for the conservative elements in power in Jerusalem. He had to be silenced; he had to die. And our divisions began, and continue, as we try to collectively wrestle with issues in our own time, in and out of the faith communities.

Greta Thunberg doesn't seem like a likely prophet. Yet at sixteen she shamed the UN General Assembly for their unwillingness to move forward and take swift action to combat climate change; but along the way she inspired millions of people young and old around the globe to join her cause. This stirred up a strong reaction among vested interests who would wish her silenced.

Malala Yousafzai was eleven the first time she publicly spoke out against the Taliban's ban on girls attending school. This stirred up a strong reaction among conservative elements and four years later the Taliban tried to assassinate her. She survived and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her progressive education campaign.

Prophets come from the most unexpected places. Paul, who watched and approved of the murder of Stephen, would soon take up Stephen's cause and spread the truth about Jesus as Messiah amongst the Greek-speaking world and, like Stephen, fell foul of the more conservative elements back in Jerusalem whose vested interests he threatened. In the end, he too was eliminated, but his words continue to inspire us.

The thing is, the stones we often reject, for being too young or poor, for being foreign or uneducated, for being of the wrong gender, for being too progressive, these stones can sometimes be the foundation upon which we all come to stand one day. We must listen closely to what the Holy Spirit is telling us before we act too swiftly to dismiss what might seem difficult ideas. We must be careful not to place stones in the pathway for others to stumble upon.

The other verses I wanted to touch upon are at the end of the reading from John's gospel: "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

These verses are complicated and need a great deal of exploration. They are the foundation stone of the church's ministry of healing, something I've been involved with for over 30 years. Perhaps when the horror we are living through right now has abated, and we are allowed to be together again, it might be the time to explore this ministry together in groups. Moses told Israel: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

Healing ministry is something all the Lord's people can participate in regardless of age, gender, education, social status, or background. Everything we do in the Church is a working out of two things, teaching the world about God, and caring for those in need.

I think you already know that, thanks be to God.

O Lord God of truth, into your hands we commend our spirits, for you have redeemed us; you are our rock, our strength. Lord, send your Holy Spirit to continue to guide us in the Way of our Saviour Jesus Christ.