

## **SERMON – 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 – Ascension**

How can we have anything in our thoughts this week other than the horrendous event of Monday night at the Manchester Arena? We woke on Tuesday morning to the news of the terrorist attack. This was not just an attack on our nation but on a concert filled with children, young people and their parents. Our hearts broke to hear the news and see the images of panic in and around the venue. There were many who were killed and injured but not only that no-one who was there will ever be the same and their families too. The feelings of helplessness, the fear and the knowledge that they had been in the middle of an evil action. And those around the Arena and in the city of Manchester were soon drawn into the unfolding events.

And in what wonderful ways people responded. People offering comfort to the distraught youngsters, taxi drivers offering free lifts home, people opening their houses to give food and drinks and even a bed for the night because the transport was disrupted and in many cases curtailed.

In the moment when the worst of humanity was seen, it was met by the best. The care, the giving, the love.

In our gospel reading Jesus was now at the end of his earthly ministry and he was about to leave his disciples. They have been with him throughout his ministry and they have heard and seen all that he has said and done. His teaching of the thousands on the hill sides or by the lakes. The miracles he had performed like feeding the vast crowds when they only had a little food to start with. The turning of water into wine and many more. The healings he performed on little children or disabled adults and even raising from death back to life.

It was a troubled world that Jesus came into and he paid the ultimate price of standing up against the society of the day. The religious priests and the secular Roman rulers.

In many ways it is still a troubled world. There is still evil and there is good. There is still violence and there is kindness. There is hatred and there is love.

He was telling his disciples that they can't just look to him being there for them at all times but they must go out into the world knowing that he will be with them through the Holy Spirit who was soon to be bestowed on them. They must then go out to do his will and spread the gospel of the coming of God's kingdom.

They were all together when he gave them their final instructions. Then he disappeared from their sight.

They had to face the turmoil of a boisterous and unpredictable city. Life was not going to be plain sailing for any of his disciples but they went out in confidence.

We are told that they spend much time in each other's company and they spend time in worshipping and praising God.

They felt that they had been blessed to have been in Jesus' company and they felt blessed that he said that in some way he would always be with them.

In his final words to them he opened their minds to how he was the fulfilment of scripture. What had been given them in the laws of Moses what had been said and predicted by the many prophets and what could be found in the words of the Psalms.

Even to the fact that he would suffer and die on a cross and rise from the dead on the third day'

Now most importantly of all his message is that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning where they were in Jerusalem.

This repentance is for individuals to turn away from sin and turn to God. But it is also for communities and nations.

This should be the agenda for change in the world. For disputing and arguing groups whether religious, ethnic, political, cultural, national or any other grouping of peoples. All who think they are right and claim to have the moral high ground must realise that despite violence and atrocities carried out by one side or the other

the only lasting way forward is the hardest one which is for repentance and forgiveness.

What should we be doing now at this time of tension between communities in our nation?

Pray for all people. All are God's children whether they are Christian or not whether they have any faith, belief or none. Pray for those working for peace and pray for situations here and around the world that they move towards peaceful solutions.

Pray in thankfulness to God who sent his son to live among us and to die for us all. And thank God for his goodness and his generosity in giving us a beautiful world.

We must always remember to spend time in worshipping and praising God and spend time in the company of other faithful people.

Then we must go out into the world and do whatever God puts before us to work for his peace. Whether it is on a one to one basis, in small groups or nationally. Our voice counts as we do our small part in helping to bring God's kingdom here on earth.

And finally in a spirit of forgiveness in the words of a crowd today in Manchester as they broke into the song by the Group Oasis. Don't look back in anger.

Amen

## **Readings**

### **Epistle - Acts 1:1-11**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he

said, 'is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' <sup>7</sup> He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

### **Gospel - Luke 24: 44-53**

Jesus said to the disciples 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup> and they were continually in the temple blessing God.