

## EASTER 6

Today is the last Sunday of Easter and we look forward to Ascension Day. I used to anyway, when I was at school, because we had the afternoon off. I never really understood why but when it happened every year – it was a firm fixture in the diary – and so, something to look forward to, but probably not for the right reasons! It is only in recent years that the Church has unofficially shunted this feast to the following Sunday (or I should say, made that a popular option) so those of you who want to join me at 10am this Thursday, please do... Festivals, Holy Days are there for a reason, and good to mark and even better to keep, and cherish.

Today's well-known Gospel reading is a beautiful and compelling vignette to sign off our Lord's ministry on this earth. We are no longer servants but friends of our Risen Lord. We are no longer watching and waiting on his every word like perpetual students (although we are of course); we are encouraged, challenged, appointed, "to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."

I have already spoken about the challenge of seedlings fighting frost in May but I think we all hear the Evangelist's words loud and clear: to keep sowing because we have a wonderful faith to share, to keep growing and nurturing others to join us in the vineyard – and if it means learning or sharing new skills and new opportunities, let God lead us there. As we keep this supreme commandment to love, we will be "abiding", literally finding our dwelling, in Christ's love. From this everything else follows.

Centuries earlier Isaiah had been proclaiming God's offer of steadfast love. To those who will listen, God offers abundant, joyful and peaceful life. Who is this for though? In Isaiah this is part of a covenant relationship between God and the Israelites. How stunning then is today's story from Acts in which Peter accepts the invitation to enter the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. In doing this he, a Jew, is breaking the rules. Can you hear the bystanders catch their breath? Boundaries are breaking down. In Cornelius' house the Holy Spirit comes on everyone. Now all are included and their thirst is quenched and sealed by the waters of Baptism. That's where and when our new life begins.

"Love one another as I have loved you" is such a simple command, yet so difficult. We have to let go of our differences, our prejudices, our instinct to hold things tight to ourselves. Following this command is possible when we

take the second part of the command – “as I have loved you” – seriously. When we know we are loved, we can let go of defending ourselves and are able to love others.

In this Christian Aid Week, as individuals and as churches of different denominations, we act out love for people who see little evidence of others’ having any love or care for them. These may be people who sew clothes for our markets for wages that don’t feed their family, who are defending their rainforest while we are buying goods that encourage its destruction, or who are living with the threat of rising waters as our governments take little action on climate change. Dwelling in Jesus’ love gives us the delight and courage to offer love to people like these. And I am delighted to tell you that ‘Churches Together in Woodbridge & Melton’ have put a new date in for all our diaries – Sunday September 19<sup>th</sup> – in which we shall gather again in Kingston Playing Fields to concentrate and reflect on this most pressing of international challenges. This is not a time for denominational differences but unity in our generation and our time to protect God’s planet, feed the hungry, and create fresh springs of living water.

My thanks to Tony Waller and his team delivering envelopes this week. If I may quote him:

“Showing we care and muttering ‘God bless this home’ as we approach a letterbox should be reward enough.” I would only change that slightly and say, don’t mutter...yy but **proclaim** on each visit: ‘God bless this home’....

because your reward will be in heaven! I don’t mean to make you blush, but that’s how seriously our Easter faith can blossom and grow – when we convert the simplest and hardest of commandments and “**go** and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

AMEN.