



Sixth Sunday of Easter

Sermon by Rev Alison Thabethe



Sunday 17 May 2020

READINGS

Acts 17: 22-31; Psalm 66: 7-19; 1 Peter 3: 13-22; John 14: 15-21

Not just passing through

There are numerous Christian songs and poems and sayings that tell us that the world is not our home. I'm sure we've all sung them or said them. An old Jim Reeves song captures the sentiment:

This world is not my home I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

It's kind of sad, but Christians relate to the sentiment and it provides a type of comfort because death holds less fear when I can say, "My home is not in this world."

Well it's wrong. I challenge that thinking. It leads to escapism and fatalism. Our home is not *of* this world, but it is most certainly *in* it – here and now.

That's not meant to take away your comfort and consolation. The day will come when we *will* see face to face and experience God without our earthly limitations, but if we are expecting to go through some pearly gates and upgrade to our mansion in the sky, we might miss out on a really beautiful and important part which requires us to be at home in our bodies.

Let me explain. Let's start by understanding that the gospel of John does portray the negative understanding of "the world" as the place where God is not known or recognised. Right in chapter one we read: "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him *the world* did not recognise him."

The world is a place of spiritual blindness. It's echoed in today's reading in verse nineteen: "Before long, *the world* will not see me anymore, but you will see me."

In John chapter sixteen we read, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." So yes, the world is also a place of suffering and struggle.

Even more reason to do what Jesus did and move into the neighbourhood.

Philippians 3:20 says that our citizenship is in heaven. Jesus said we belong to another kingdom, God's kingdom. But the heavenly realm does not start after death somewhere beyond the blue. The kingdom of heaven is also amongst us and our home address currently is *in the world*.

Why does this matter? Because of the word “home”. Home truly is where the heart is. We associate it with relationship and family and being real. i.e. Everything the world needs and everything that Jesus promised in today’s gospel reading. We need to hear these words: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...You will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” He also said, “The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” That sounds like a home: love, family, relationship and presence.

The condition is to follow Jesus’ commandments and do as he did. Which means the prerequisite for this home is *love*. Let’s not make the mistake of thinking that salvation is just about me and my ticket to my “real home.” We are not just “renting” here on earth and we’re not exempt from the call to love as Jesus did. Love does not turn its back on pain. It doesn’t give up when the situation looks hopeless. It is messy and it drives out fear and it never fails.

This sounds scary and Jesus knew the world is an alienating and hostile place, so he gave the strength we need. The link who completes the circle and brings it all together is God’s Spirit – our advocate who will help us and be with us forever. He is the constant presence of Love, always linking this world and the next, always bringing heaven to earth, always transforming the world and loving it into wholeness ... THROUGH US.

If you don’t know how you’re going to do that today and tomorrow, well, apart from faith neither do I. But he has never left us yet. Take heart that you are not a wanderer passing through, neither are you a spiritual orphan. Love has made his home in you and your home is here, where God is.