

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: JOHN 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled..."

REFLECT:

I wonder what Jesus meant when he spoke of many rooms – or dwelling places – in his Father's house. Maybe something about the hospitality of God, who has room for lots of guests. Maybe something about the space God makes to accommodate diversity. You like loud drums? Peace and quiet? Dancing? Stillness? Company? Solitude? That's OK; there are many rooms in my Father's house. I'm going to prepare a place for you.

I find myself thinking of the online 'zoom' services some of us have been taking part in, where we look at a screen filled with little video images of one another in our many different rooms. It seems like an apt, albeit slightly bizarre, illustration of the house Jesus describes.

I also find myself thinking of the people who are particularly disadvantaged in this lockdown. Those who don't have many rooms. Or a garden. Flats where large families are cooped up together. Those living in the shanty towns and refugee camps of the world, where safe social distancing just isn't an option. And those living on the streets, for whom staying indoors isn't an option either.

This passage in John's Gospel is part of a longer section that's referred to as Jesus' 'farewell discourse.' He's preparing his disciples for what lies ahead. They have no concept of the way the bottom's about to fall out of their world; that they will see their beloved teacher and all their hopes and expectations nailed to the cross. No idea of the shattering grief and confusion to come, and the re-imagining, the resurrection, that will be needed afterwards.

We're all different and will have different responses to what's going on around us right now, but it feels to me like we're shifting into a new phase of this lock-down period. Some of the novelty, the early adrenaline-filled energy, the heroism and nostalgic 'blitz spirit' is waning. Like the disciples, Thomas and Philip, we're struggling to see the way ahead. We don't know what comes next.

Jesus gives us words to anchor us. "Believe in me" he says. "I am the way, the truth, the life". "Do not let your hearts be troubled." "I will go ahead of you."

PRAY:

This week I invite you to try praying with a 'prayer word'. Sometimes it can be hard to know where to begin to pray, particularly in times like these when the need in the world seems overwhelming, and when so much that we had come to take for granted is threatened or disappearing, leaving us feeling disoriented.

A prayer word is a simple, repeated word or phrase, a bit like a 'mantra' in meditation. It can help to still and focus our minds. A very simple one I sometimes use is 'love.' I pay attention to my breathing. As I inhale, I breathe love into my being. As I exhale, I return love to God and breathe it out to the world. You might, instead, like to choose some of Jesus' words of promise from today's passage as your prayer word. Perhaps, "believe in me." Or "you know the way" / "I am the way".

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:
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