



7 May 2023 - Archbishop Stephen Cottrell | A moment of Reflection.

Every week the Diocese of York offers a prayer video for churches to use either online or in their services. The Archbishop of York leads in a moment of Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Easter. This is also the Sunday following the Coronation of King Charles III.

The text of the reflection follows in full

The opening verses of John 14 are, for me, some of the most beautiful in the whole of scripture. They are so real and they are so comforting. You won't be surprised to hear they are often read at funerals.

Jesus has just washed his disciples feet. He has given them the new commandment that they must love one another.

Now he begins to teach them. "Do not let your heart be troubled," he says. "Trust in God, and trust also in me. My Father's house has many rooms..." Though I rather like the mis-translation, 'In my Father's caravan, there are many wagons', because it makes the same point - the spaciousness of God's house and God's heart - but adds that little twist of journey and pilgrimage.

There is a destination. There is a home.

"I'm going to prepare a place for you" says Jesus, "and after I've gone I will return to take you with me so that where I am, you may be too."

In these words, Jesus is speaking about his death and resurrection and about the place prepared for us in glory.

I have to go, says Jesus, because I have to plumb the depths of death and darkness, and this is how I will be able to prepare a place for you.

But I will return. And I will take you with me.

And even though we can't imagine or know what that place will be like – though elsewhere when scripture speaks about the life of heaven it often uses the image of a banquet. I find this very encouraging indeed, especially on a weekend of street parties and festivities. I'll come to those in a minute - what Jesus speaks about here is that heaven is being where he is. That heaven is a person as well as a place. It is to be with Jesus. It is to be in the presence of the beloved and it is therefore to discover just how beloved we are.

"You know the way to the place I am going," concludes Jesus

But, of course, inevitably, it is never feels that simple. It is beautiful and attractive, but also mysterious and troubling.

So Thomas speaks up.

And the question he asks is painfully human. It is a version of the question all of us ask, often in the still hours of the night when we can't sleep, and gripped by fear, and conscious of our own mortality, and wondering whether life has any meaning at all, we cry out to the God we are suddenly not sure whether we even believe in: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

And Jesus's answer, again, points us to nowhere other than himself.

If you are looking for a way, says Jesus, then I am the way.

If you are looking for truth and meaning in life, then I am that truth and that meaning.

And if you are looking for life itself, then I am that life, the one who was with the Father, from the very beginning, the one who has emptied himself of what it is to be God, in order to know what it is to be human, the one who will die upon the cross and rise again.

Everything else in life will fade away. But Jesus remains; and it is Jesus, and what he promises that is the only way, the only truth, and the only life life has to give us. The only one that lasts.

Yes, there are other ways and other truths and many of them are good. But all that is good comes from God. And God remains.

This, beautiful and powerful truth, the truth about Jesus and his way of life, is woven throughout the coronation service that we will all be watching on the television this weekend, and in which I have the huge and humbling privilege of playing a small part.

And I want to point us to two details that I find very beautiful in this service for they are details that point to Jesus and his sovereignty and gentle rule of justice and peace.

Note, the service begins with a child speaking: 'Your Majesty, as children of the kingdom of God, we welcome you in the name of the king of kings.'

And the King replies in his name – the name of Jesus, the name of the king of kings – and after his example, 'I come not to be served but to serve.'

That service, which was the heart of Jesus' leadership, is the first note played in the coronation liturgy, and it takes us straight away to that same upper room, and Jesus' commandment to love, and his instruction to serve.

And, secondly, all the pomp and show, all the splendour and majesty of the coronation service are set in the context of the most simple and basic Christian worship, the service of Holy Communion, the service Jesus gave his Church on that same night, the night of service. And in sharing bread and wine, we receive him as our way, our truth and our life. And in our churches this Sunday, and Sunday by Sunday, and week by week and year by year, it is the celebration of the Holy Communion that is the answer God gives us to Thomas' question, and to our question. And in those times when we feel lost or lonely, abandoned, bereft, defeated or hopeless, and when we do not know the way, we hold out our empty hands, as King Charles does in the Coronation service, and receive the bread of life, the bread of Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. For he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and it is through him that we come to the Father.