

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Easter 6A

Sunday 17th May 2020

Called to be alongside - being a community of hope and love.

Farewells are hard.

Even Jesus and his disciples found this difficult.

Yet in the midst of it Jesus found the words and the way to reassure, to comfort and console.

He reminded them that all is not lost – that another advocate will come to be with them and be in them.

‘If you love me’ he says, ‘keep my commandments.’

The Father will give another advocate to be with you forever, he will be in you.

Jesus’ concern is all about the value of the relationship with them and that this will continue.

To love him is to keep his commandment to love, to be within his love and that he will be within them and that this is true for us.

I am struck by the words ‘another advocate’.

The words used for advocate actually literally means ‘one called alongside’.

Jesus will send another to be alongside them, to comfort, console and encourage, to be with them.

For Jesus has been the first called alongside them, has lived with them, taught them, guided them and loved them.

Yet they will not be left orphaned.

Even though he is on his way to death, this is not the end of the story.

Through his rising from the dead that we celebrate this Eastertide Jesus lives, so we hear Jesus say 'because I live, you also will live'.

These words talk about an interweaving of his life with the Father's that we experience in the Spirit that we are caught up within.

These words are comforting words.

They speak of God being with us, of love being deep within us which we can trust.

We can speak of the hope that is in us even when things are difficult, even when we suffer.

Today is a sad day, as we come to terms with the news that Jonathan Chambers died peacefully on Friday night.

Jonathan was one whose life revealed the hope that was in him. He was and is a beautiful spirit who knew how to enjoy life.

He had great wisdom that came from a life fully inhabited – of pain faced and let go of and healed and a life that was lived whole heartedly.

Jonathan is now at peace in God's loving arms and lives on there, as he does in each one of us.

He is still present with us as one of the communion of saints.

His death and this reading today have caused me to think of how my life speaks of the hope that is in me and how as a parish we together speak of the hope that is in us.

As Daniel O'Leary says 'God comes to us disguised as our lives.'
The way we live, who we are and what we experience speaks of
the hope that is in us.

We have each experienced God coming to us in Jonathan.

As human beings, as Christians we do not have control over what
happens to us in life.

Haven't the last couple of months taught us something about
that!

Yet even so the presence of our loving God is.

God's presence is here come what may and is revealed in us.

There is still hope in us and we can speak of it and live it.

I wonder how that is true for you?

How can you speak of the hope that is in you?

How do you and can you show the hope and love that is within
you?

Perhaps we've caught a glimpse of that through Jonathan.

I know many of us can find it hard at times to share in words the
hope that is in you, let alone living it, when suffering is hard on
our heels.

I know many of us have found the last couple of months very
challenging.

We have each needed to learn different ways of being with one
another, different ways of staying connected and being church.

Yet we have done that.

Some of us have found ringing people challenging.

Yet to ring someone is a simple way of showing love.

To be in contact with each other is a simple way of loving, a simple way of serving, even if we struggle with what words to say.

It is one thing we can do to show love even in small and simple ways to be open with each other.

Through this we learn that it is okay to be open, it is okay to be vulnerable.

Being present to each other is one of the most important things that we can do.

Jesus was called to be alongside us in life and death and new life. And in the Spirit promised to us.

We are also called to be alongside others, to be with them.

God is here with us through each other even when we are physically distant.

We can still be close to one another and be present and this is hope indeed.

In the name of the one who is always with us, our God of love.
Amen.

Lectios:

1 Peter 3.13-22

Psalm 66.7-19

John 14.15-21