

New Letter St Mary's & St Augustine's Sunday 17 May Easter 6

Sunday's Readings: Acts 17.22-31; John 14.15-21; Psalm 66

Wednesday's Readings: Psalm 15; 2 Sam 23.1-5; Col 2.20-3.4.

Reflection on Psalm 66 by Rev Cannon Mike West (Associate Vicar St Augustine's)

I used this story often (too often?) in my time as Chaplain to the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue service. A rather foolish rambler was standing close to the edge of a high cliff admiring the view – imagine one of the huge quarries in the Peak District - too close as it happened for the edge crumbled and he fell down the cliff face. He had more luck than he deserved and managed to grab a small bush on the cliff face. As he hung there he cried out “God help me!”. At that moment a Mountain rescue team on a practice exercise came to the cliff edge, looked down and began to lower a rope. “Don't bother yourselves” shouted the foolish rambler, “God will help me”. They stood back. A few minutes later an Air Sea Rescue helicopter happened to fly by, hovered, weighed up the situation and began to deploy a crew member on a winch. “Don't bother yourselves God will help me” he shouted, so they withdrew. Finally, a Fire engine (you guessed they would turn up!) arrived bumping along a rough track through the quarry. They got the same reception as the Mountain rescue team and the helicopter crew.

At this point the bush gave way and the foolish rambler fell to his death hundreds of meters below. Sometime later during his reception interview at the Pearly Gates (a rambler who goes to heaven; that's the least believable part of the story!) the Angel on duty asked him if he has any questions. “I called out several times for God to help me but He didn't; why?” The angel checked the records. “God sent you a Mountain Rescue team, an Air Sea rescue helicopter and a team of Firefighters – weren't they good enough for you?”.

I was never embarrassed to tell the all-too-human firefighters that they were doing God's work, not least when they risked their own lives to save others -that's the way God does things. In these last seven weeks, in these terrible times, we have come to realise how much we depend on the dedication, skill (and equipment; but that's another issue) of women and men from across the whole world in the NHS, in Care Homes and in the community. Let me quote at length an article by Gavin Francis, a GP in Edinburgh reporting on just one night time emergency visit to a patient who has reported flu-like symptoms:

I phoned the patient from my car for directions. His breath came in short gasps. “Are you alone? Can you sit near the door?” I opened the boot of the car; thermometer, oxygen sensor, stethoscope all in a plastic bag. Apron on, mask on,

gloves on and a second pair over the first. The apron flew about in the wind. Visor on at last – I had warned the patient I would be dressed like this, and would want to fit him with mask and gloves. The patient was sitting on a stool just inside his front door, struggling to breathe. He couldn't manage to tie the mask. Wishing my forearms weren't bare and holding my breath I leaned over him and knotted the ties at the back of his head. The article goes into some detail as the Gavin checks the man's symptoms, decides it's probably Covid-19 and that he must go to hospital. The article goes on as he says to the patient “I'm now going outside then I'll phone you

*ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all your people; [*particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world*

about what happens next". I returned to the car trying to hold central to my awareness and every action that there was virus on the walls, the door handle, my gloves and all my equipment. I took off the outer layer of gloves which went into the clinical waste bag and wiped clean all my equipment and my visor. Finally I put into the waste bag the wipes the other gloves, and the apron. I phoned for an ambulance and then phoned the patient to tell him that he is going to hospital.

Just one example of the dedication, skill and equipment that God's agents have been deploying. Anyone who has a close up experience of the Health and Care services, as I have twice in the past twelve months, will be giving thanks for every workers' dedication, skill and equipment plus the current added risk of infection and the pressures of numbers of patients. I suggest that these Thursday evenings the collective hand clapping (plus my loud school bell ringing) are a liturgy of thanksgiving, yes a Liturgy: "the work of the people" The experiences of these seven weeks have reminded me that in our usual liturgies there is all too little specific mention of the ways that God helps us, nor of the needs of His agents who bring that help in so many ways. Perhaps we should use more often the General Thanksgiving from the old prayer book, still available in Common Worship, with the added provision to mention particular "late mercies vouchsafed unto us"

The Psalm 66 which is set for today begins: Bless our God you peoples, make the voice of his praise be heard; Who holds our souls in life, and will not allow our feet to slip. Yes, don't risk standing too close to the edge! It goes on:

*For you, O God, have proved us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.*

*You brought us into the snare;
you laid heavy burdens on our backs;
you let the enemy ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of refreshment.*

My commentary suggests that this Psalm was written as a national thanksgiving for Israel's delivery from a conquest, after a troubled time. Then it was used during troubled times to express their hope in the God who helps. Perhaps you feel a heavy burden laid on your back, or that the enemy Coronavirus is riding over your head. For all of us it may be too early to speak of "a place of refreshment" as a lived experience in the present, but it is a promise. And so it's not too early for our liturgy every Thursday and our liturgy every Sunday to include general and specific thanksgivings for all the help that God gives us.

Collect for Sunday

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
Keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thank You !!! To all who helped raise money for Christian Aid a combined total of £1460 so far to help some of the poorest communities who will have been hit hardest in this crisis.

Next Thursday is Ascension Day followed by 10 Days of Prayer taking us to Pentecost. We will send out some prayer resources for you next week. Yo Tozer-Loft has offered to co-ordinate a 24 hr prayer marathon for Sat 30th May if you want to take part for a 30 mins slot please contact her 007925 63440

Thy Kingdom Come Beacon Event remotely from Rotherham Minster 4pm Sunday 31st May. Cannon Sophie will be preaching. Tickets on line **EventBrite registration link:** <https://sheffdio.org/tkc20>

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