

At the Ascension Day service on Thursday, 8 pieces of music were selected by you, the Cathedral Community as part of our *Desert Island Discs* project – seeing the gift of music to help raise us up to God through these hard times. We had around 50 sent in and one of them we sadly didn't have time to mention were the words of the famous Liverpool anthem which seemed to be played at many funerals in the city when I was based up there in 1993. You can perhaps sing along!

*When you walk through a storm,
Hold your head up high, And don't be afraid of the dark
At the end of a storm, There's a golden sky, And the sweet silver song of a lark
Walk on through the wind, Walk on through the rain,
Though your dreams be tossed and blown
Walk on, walk on, With hope in your heart, And you'll never walk alone*

Well despite all of the wonderful support that so many of us have felt from the communities around us, people who *have* been bereaved or attending funerals have very much *had* to walk alone. Not only have many loved ones probably died alone, but at a funeral I took the other day, members of the family had to sit apart and go back to their homes alone. Never in 23 years of ministry have I felt this isolation; I struggled to hold back tears from my eyes and desperately wanted to give them a hug – something many of us are missing. In the words of the song, – it was hard for us any of us *to hold our heads up high, let alone have the prospect that at the end of the storm, there will be a golden sky.* A real contrast to when Jesus departed the earth where in St Luke's Gospel the disciples leave with their heads up and go to the Temple to praise God. Certainly we turn and praise God at funerals, but I question St Luke's words as to whether they *did rejoice* - after you've known and loved someone, it so very hard to just walk away because the physical human loss is so great and personal.

With hindsight knowledge, the confidence the disciples perhaps had, was that Jesus had promised them that the Holy Spirit - the advocate, would come - something that they would not be able to see, something that would have been difficult to conceive – yet something they had belief and hope in. And supporting others that assurance that life *can* have hope, in the future is something that's essential to give, especially if you're bereaved personally, or as this time as a country, world where we are facing such loss whether it's employment, freedom, spiritual gifts – the sacrament and other ways where the routine of life has disappeared.

At the beginning it's often impossible to imagine that life can go on or get better. Bereavement often creates - hard, forced spaces to think about how we have to go forward (because life still goes on) and whether or how we need to

adapt, develop or change our lives because of what's happened. It's often friends or advocates, who *have* been through that journey who can *appreciate* rather than *know* how we feel, that can help us and be that support and guide to direct us. And gradually *we learn to live* with our loss and hopefully reshape life not to go back to necessarily how things were, but with the memories and the courage to create and shape new life around us. After my mother died 3 years ago, my father took up cooking and he's doing dinner parties in *his* way very different than hers! It's walk on, walk on and cook on, cook on! One of our congregation recently said to me that she hopes that the recent change in having shopping hours for the elderly - will stay and we won't have to go back to crowded supermarkets where vulnerable people are ignored or pushed aside.

I pray that the end of the storm, the Lock Down will soon come, but there will both be the clear up and the replanting begin, but also the perhaps needed thinking and reality check that things won't be the same. Some people especially the elderly sadly won't be able to come back at first or at all; others may wish to join us virtually in the future – and we may need to look at resourcing church that's not stopped, but continues on line to reach out to people and continue to connect with people – vulnerable, elderly, sick and disabled who couldn't access our worship. As in any major change in life, whether it be a war, a fire or this current experience – the question arises and is being asked *do we want to go back to how it was before* which in bereavement is very difficult and usually unrealistic to do, – or can we go forward with memory and see that something different will emerge as it did for the faithful disciples, Mary and more. praying and walking not alone *but with dreams being tossed and blown* with the coming of the birth of the Church at Pentecost. They won't looking back – they were looking forward!

As we are in the middle of the time *Thy Kingdom Come* when we are invited to pray for the future, Mary who is specifically mentioned in our reading from Acts was with those disciples prayed! In May, the month when we especially remember her example (which you can find as one of those resources on the *Thy Kingdom Come* website) we can find a way to look up because *she is open to God. And when we are prepared to be open – look forward and* prepare for the Spirit to come and enter! God has more opportunity to do greater things than if our minds, hearts and attitude are closed, which the Disciples had been after Christ's Death.

But the Disciples were prepared for something new, something unexpected as they prayed and trusted God even with loss and grief, alongside supposed joy,. *Are we?* And as they were commissioned to continue fulfilling the work which Jesus entrusted to them with the spirit, which we hear about in today's Gospel

written (just before Jesus himself is arrested), – how might we seek to pray and be equipped with the spirit to how we may continue to grow and I emphasise *grow* rather than *preserve* the church for the future. How or what sort of church do we – and we being the Community, City, Congregation, County, Country *want to see* – for yourself; following his announcement +Mark Tanner, Bishop elect is asking us *what is it that I really want to see God doing among us?* (You can find that #WeAreChesterDiocese). What seeds might be planted from what we’re doing now, that may come to fruition and spring up? What fruits of the Spirit may emerge and where or what sort of Church may continue? What seeds or fruits have to be cut and sadly laid to rest?

Like the process of bereavement, this transition period is important to face. It’s not easy but it’s a time to pray and be positive and think how can we go forward – and what direction and shape will that take place in worship, discipleship, stewardship, pastoral care and fellowship – those outlined in the next chapter of Acts which will be read at next week’s Pentecost service. I’d like us to all start thinking – and thinking and praying about how *we walk on, walk on* with God and others, because together we can create a way forward, as we do with those who are widowed or bereaved – it may be tough and tricky, but it can be there.

So ...on this Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost in the *Thy Kingdom Come* period, let’s lift our eyes to God and to Jesus in heaven, and prepare ourselves in how the Holy Spirit may transform our vision of where and what God is calling us to be as his Church post COVID19. Part of a prayer and reading I use at funeral is one by William Penn, with the words on the screen and you can pray with me now.

For what is yours is ours if we are yours. And life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only an horizon, and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sights. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly ... prepare us for that happy place, that where you are, we may also be for evermore. Amen.

May we enable that as we walk on in our minds and hearts, but hope with our hearts that our Cathedral, our Church, our Community will be a place never to be alone, but to be one that calls all of us *wherever we are* to find us a place where they can come and be drawn up to Christ and through the Spirit and in his love, find healing, wholeness and resurrection post lock down and beyond.