

Group Notes 22 May 2011

The Way, the Truth and the Life

Welcome - Ice Breaker

What earthly pleasure do you still hope will be there to enjoy in heaven?

Word - Sermon Summary: John 14:1-14

Today's reading is taken from the last supper. As Jesus speaks he is just a couple of hours away from being arrested, before nightfall the next day He will be dead and buried.

It is a reading frequently used at funerals. As a vicar, it's quite sobering to stand by someone who has died and say the service for them knowing that you too are a mortal person and one day someone will be saying the same words over you. Will Jesus keep his promise to bring us home with Him?

So what comfort can we draw from these words? Can they be more to us than just words in the face of the terrible fact and finality of death? It's just a promise – and we've got so used to people breaking their promises in this cynical age.

As I see it, Jesus makes this promise dependent on trust. That's how He starts off in v.1. "Trust what I have said." "I personally am going to see you through this," v.2. "Your relationship with me will not be broken," v.4 –" it can't be broken because of who I am, because the Father and I are one," v.9-10. Because God cannot break His promise, because God is eternal and therefore our relationship with Him is also eternal, because we are in Christ and Christ is in God, we can trust Him to deliver us from death's power.

So on what grounds can we find this trust?

- Integrity of Jesus - His character is without parallel either in history or fiction. All good characters in fiction are bland, Jesus was anything but – yet He is clearly good all the way through.
- He was prepared to risk His own life in the belief that His father would raise Him from the dead. That's what happened to Him next day. He doesn't ask us to trust any more than He Himself did.
- Evidence – Jesus really did rise from the dead. There is no other way to account for his missing body or the dramatic transformation of the leaderless, demoralised disciples into world beaters

Jesus is the way – He leads us through the darkness and out the other side. He has already come through the valley of shadows before us. All He asks us to do is follow in His steps.

Is this an unquestioning trust? Praise God for Thomas's question – we would never have this wonderful saying of Jesus if Thomas had not asked! We can bring our questions and uncertainties and fears to the Lord. But we must do so from that place of trust.

Word 2 - Discussion Questions:-

Not all these questions will be equally suitable for every group – please be selective.

- Make a list of people that are not as trusted in Britain today as perhaps they once were. I'll start you off with bankers...
 - Do you think there has been an erosion of trust in public life?
 - Do you think this has made us less trusting and more cynical?
- Think of people you trust. What are the qualities that inspire you to trust them?
 - How many of these trust-inspiring qualities apply to Jesus?
 - What is the difference between "belief" and "trust"?
- What do you think of Thomas' question in verse 5?
 - Does questioning like this show a lack of faith?
 - Or should we bring our uncertainties and fears to God?
- How big a thing do you think is the fear of death for people today?
 - There used to be a Christian tradition of a good death – one where you have made peace with God and step out into the darkness full of faith and hope. Is this realistic today?
 - What would you say to somebody who believes death is the end? How would you explain the Christian belief in a life to come to them?

Worship Ideas

Read Psalm 23 as a meditation, with pauses for people to reflect, in the following format:

- *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.* The green pastures are the places where you draw satisfaction and fulfilment from in your life. Think quietly for a few minutes about the green pastures the Lord has led you through...
- *He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul, He guides me in right pathways for His name's sake.* The still waters are the spiritual times when the Lord comes close to you and quenches your thirst. Take a few minutes to recollect when He last met with you in this way...
- *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me.* Even when life is difficult, when we are afraid, when we endure pain and death, Jesus is with us like a Good Shepherd who will never abandon His sheep. What challenges are facing you at the moment? Invite Him in to those challenges to face them with you.
- *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over. Surely your goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* Look forward with hope to the Father's house, to the party God is preparing for us, to the promise Jesus gave that He personally will get us there...
- Conclude with a prayer of thanks that we can trust Him at every stage in life's journey.

Works / Witness

- A recent Group Notes gave the following challenge: "What about praying for the opportunity to witness to one person this week about Jesus?" Did anyone do this? What happened?
- If you were at the MAF presentation at 10am on Sunday, what did you think of it? Would your group like to support MAF in some special way?
- There is going to be a new round of training for Street Pastors soon. I am disappointed that none of the present group of Street Pastors is from St Matthew's. Is anyone in your group interested?
- Liz Burley want to challenge each home / cell group to find a way to support the Holiday Club on 1-5 August. For example, it's £5 per day per child. Would your group like to sponsor a child for the week? Or commit to pray for the project? Or offer practical help? Please discuss.