

Ascension day 2020 John 17:1-11

I was speaking to a gentleman only yesterday, the son of the lady who I had conducted her funeral service,

Still grieving made more difficult because of lockdown he was unable to say goodbye,

The only consolation I have were to remember the last words she said to me.

Last words are important, they can be very powerful,. They can bring much joy and encouragement but unfortunately they can leave us with a sense of regret or pain.

For the son , his mothers last words are ones that have remain in his mind and are played over and over again, thankfully bringing some small comfort.

Every Christmas we are reminded that Mary pondered and stored in her heart the words of the Angel and the shepherds had spoken to her.

Words that she remember throughout her sons life and death.

If I were to ask a group of people to recall the last words of Jesus, I'm guessing that many might say “ **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”** or

“Father into your hands I commend my spirit”

Today we celebrate Ascension, the day Jesus spoke his last words on earth. After his resurrection and remaining with his disciples for 40 more day, teaching on them of the kingdom of God.

Jesus now informs them he is now leaving them and returning to the fathers side in heaven.

At Christmas Christ came from heaven to earth,
Ascension is his return Journey from earth to heave.

Acts reading 1 v 6 The disciples still full of questions.

But Jesus said not to worry about anything God has it all in hand
...his plan will unfold at His time. But until then ...in his final words.

**“YOU shall receive power when the holy spirit comes from You
and You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and
Samaria and the ends of the Earth”**

You shall receive power and you will be my witnesses...

I wonder how often we not only remember but ponder his last
words in our heart and minds.

You shall receive power you should be my witnesses

I would like us to use our imaginations for a moment.

We are sitting in a court room as the victim of a serious crime,
You're so relieved to hear a witness has come forward,

As everyone is seated the lawyer calls forward the witness and
starts to question him/her.

“About the day in question”

"what time is it" the lawyer asks

"Who were you with?

" where were you going?

And the lawyer continues to question the witness about the events
surrounding the crime.

Did you see the Accused enter into the shop?

No

Did you see the accused with a gun?

No

Well please tell us what did you see then he asked

Nothing responds witness

Nothing!

No nothing said the man, "when I saw the man with a gun I was afraid and put my hands over my eyes"

Some witness, I'm sure you will agree.....

Jesus last words

You should be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the ends of the Earth

The Christian Gospels that we know so well , are written by those who are witnesses to what they have seen and heard.

In the gospels we're not just getting information and data about Jesus

but are witness accounts of how Christ has touched the lives of the people around him

"you should be my witnesses in Jerusalem in Judea, Somalia and to the ends of the Earth

you shall be.....

and so they were, witnesses that have told the account so that we have come also to believe.

Witnessing telling others of our faith in God.

Has there ever been a time such as this where people need to hear about the love and purposes of God when everything around us is strange and confusing Frustrating and challenging and for many overwhelming

For them where does a hope come from,
it may not so very long ago been from their wealth, or their work,
their position, even their relationships,

But these things are all being stripped away.

Where does their or our hope come from?

Reflecting on this I was reminded of a painting I saw some time ago.

It was a painting of someone in a boat in the middle of a storm,
dark, menacing almost black skies above, waves crashing around .
The boat looking like it was going to overturn,

There in the boat was a lone person one arm stretched out with one hand tightly clinging to the mast while the other arm reached down into the roaring waves, holding on another person sinking into the waves, hanging on for dear life.

As Christ people we are called to be his witnesses drawing others into a faith which will not only hold and sustain them but to give hope, purpose and meaning.

I remember once a radio presenter I can't remember his name but he said **too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium,**

We are living in difficult times and we're all under a certain amount of stress but let us remember that we have one who is not just holding onto us but enabling us to be witnesses

On the day of Jesus Ascension, The followers stood there looking up to heaven as he went out of sight.

But then left and continued witnessing to the amazing things Christ have done in their lives

Yes let us turn and face heaven as we worship God, but let us even in our restricted times demonstrate and share our confidence and trust in the Lord

Let us help other people discover the source of wholeness
And the opportunity of eternal life

“you shall receive power when the holy spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses” .

We have been baptised by water and the spirit and we have the power the power given to us by God to make a difference to people out there who may be the ones adrift at sea

We have all that it takes to bring people to the knowledge and the love of God through what we say and do in their presence.

How can we do this at a time of lockdown

We could invite others neighbours and friends to connect to our services.

I've heard How individuals and making meals for the neighbours and the vulnerable and still managing to keep at a distance, and yet knowing that they are doing it because Christ's love for them riches beyond themselves.

How about putting notes in the doors of people down the street asking them to mention one thing that may have encouraged them through this time and another thing that they have been challenged by or would like prayer for. We could make a prayer tree by placing both thanksgiving prayers and prayers of need on the tree in the church garden.

We can all think of ways to use this tie to be witnesses for our Lord, It is all too easy to get dragged down with the challenges rather than look up to the heavens and see where our help come from.

Witnessing is not just hoping people that will know we are Christians and hoping that it will affect them

Witnessing is telling the story and acting on what we have been told.

When my father died he said ' take care of your mother?

Through the good times and the more challenging times that is my family is priority, To act on what was asked of us

Let us ponder seriously the last words of Christ let us store them in our hearts and let us act on Jesus command "go to be witnesses" of our faith in Christ, that others may believe.