



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Easter 3 2020 *BCP 1662*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia!

Over recent weeks we have, daily, been bombarded with statistics and figures, opinion pieces, news stories, Twitter feeds, government briefings, directives from archbishops and bishops – much of which has been contradictory at best or downright confusing at its worst.

All of this ‘stuff’ shows just how difficult it is for anyone to understand or make sense of complex issues and information about which even the world experts can’t agree, even when the data comes from similar sets of arguments and figures and analyses.

In some ways, Jesus’ disciples were faced with a similar conundrum after Good Friday; they had seen Jesus put to death and they had buried his very obviously dead body in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb.

They knew the ‘facts’, but in the days which followed, the evidence presented to them, led them - albeit gradually and hesitatingly - to the conclusion that Jesus was very much alive, although not just ‘brought back to life’.

Resurrected, changed, but nevertheless really and truly alive!

The conflicting and confusing facts gathered together from those who had met the risen Lord, overwhelmingly pointed to one thing, although the

evidence of their experience of events just a few days before pointed to another.

How could the disciples make any sense out of such a thing?

What parameters did the disciples have to judge the evidence before them?

How could they grapple and unpack – let alone understand the facts as they became available to them?

But then, Jesus' disciples were always rather slow on the uptake!

I am always surprised by just how little the disciples understood about Jesus and his ministry when he was alive; when he walked and talked and ate with them over three years.

Even when Jesus spelled things out in words of one syllable to them, his disciples seemed either slow on the uptake *or* deliberately unwilling to understand him.

One might forgive the crowds for failing to comprehend, but it is very difficult to excuse Jesus' closet friends and followers for not catching on.

This morning's gospel reading is a case in point.

I am going to the Father, says Jesus, but it seems not to register with them.

Were they being deliberately obtuse? Were they even trying to understand what Jesus was saying to them?

Well, with the benefit of hindsight, we can be a little harsh on the disciples, I suppose.

We know the story of Jesus from beginning to end: the evangelists have set out the story in a logical and theologically rich sequence for us, but the disciples lived out the events in real time. They had no idea of what lay ahead for them - or for Jesus - as they walked the road with him – in real time.

The disciple found it hard to understand Jesus even when he enacted something in gestures that were crystal-clear.

Even when he washes their feet, they failed to understand what was going on; when he spoke to them really clearly about someone who will betray him, they chose not to comprehend.

When Jesus spoke of his ‘glorification’ – such a thing was, for them, utterly impossible to grasp: all they could see were the dark and menacing forces of the Chief Priests and the Temple Guards closing in ever more closely.

And now, as if adding insult to the injury of their confusion and their bewilderment, Jesus talks about going to the Father.

No wonder the disciples couldn’t get their heads around what Jesus was saying to them. Their frightened, confused minds simply couldn’t cope with what must have appeared to them an endless stream of conundrums!

But Jesus was not, of course, playing games with his faithful – if rather slow – disciples. Jesus was trying lay before them the facts as he saw them: his inevitable arrest and his certain death.

Jesus knew that these things would be very means by which Jesus’ true glory will be revealed; the glory he shares with the Father and the Spirit; the glory he has shared with the Father and the Spirit from before Creation, and which he shall share with them again.

By being delivered up in to the hands of those who will kill him, the Son will, be delivered into the arms of his Father; although the Father has never left the Son's side; and because the Father and the Son are One, their mutual limitless love will bring forth the promised Comforter, the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, the One who will turn the disciples' hearts, once again, to joy, the Holy Spirit who will fill them with unimagined power, and, who will, at last, open their eyes and unstop their ears and lead them into all truth: the truth they have been so slow to grasp.

Jesus is going from his disciples, but the Holy Spirit is coming on his Church, and the Spirit will come not only to remind the disciples of all that Jesus has said to them but to make all that he has said clear and to commission them to take up what has been Jesus' message and mission to make it their own.

The hour is coming, warns Jesus as he sits at supper with the twelve, and the hour is coming very soon, for weeping and lamenting; the hour is coming which will be as bitter and as painful for them as it is for a woman in the final stages of a difficult labour; **but**, promises Jesus, through this they will find themselves reborn, delivered safely through Jesus' pain and anguish into a new world, a new creation, the world of the Spirit.

The very real sorrow and bewilderment felt by the disciples, is about to be turned to joy through the power of the Spirit who will be sent to be their guide and their strength: everything will become clear to them and, very quickly, they will realise that they have already learned the song that has been sung by Jesus through the past three years with them.

So, come Holy Spirit, teach us to sing the song that Jesus and his apostles sang and renew the face of the earth. Alleluia!