

Sermon

'A beautiful day in the neighbourhood'

10 May 2020



'It's a beautiful day in the neighbourhood. Such a beautiful day for a neighbour. Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be, my neighbour?' Good morning, friend.

This morning I accepted an invitation to take a funeral here on Friday. A non-parishioner, I look forward to the opportunity to meet my new neighbor and friend tomorrow. There, I will take my lead from A Prayer Book for Australia, whose funeral service includes the comforting words of Jesus' this morning,

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.'

'It's a beautiful day in the neighbourhood. Such a beautiful day for a neighbour. Would you be mine? Could you be mine?'

Comforting, too, are the music and words, of Fred Rogers, played by Tom Hanks, in the movie I saw this week with my family, 'A beautiful day in the neighbourhood'. A timely story of love's triumph over a cynical world. In a

poignant moment, Fred breaks the awkward silence that often surrounds the subject of death, with this:

‘You know, death is something many of us are uncomfortable speaking about. But to die is to be human. And anything human is mentionable. Anything mentionable is manageable. [pause] Anything mentionable is manageable.’

Our destiny is eternal life with God. But this destiny reaches into this life. Something we may remember, at this time of the coronavirus: our destiny, is our identity. Our identity, is now. An identity that comes, not from the world in its cynicism, but from God, who is love. Not from this world below, but from God, who is above.

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus’ fate is now imminent. His fate, that is love’s triumph over a cynical world. A love, lost on Thomas and Philip, whose hearts were set, not on God, but on themselves. They had become part of a lost world. They had come to ask, along with Pontius Pilate, ‘What is truth?’

Jesus says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

In Jesus claim to be the truth, what he means is that he is the truth about God. The God who alone is truth. The truth that is revealed, only at the end of history. The end of each one of our histories. The end of the history of the world.

Jesus claim, to be, uniquely, one with God. To be himself the one revelation of the one God, in whom the human race lives and moves and has its being, is what would lead him to his trial, for the sin of blasphemy, and Messianic pretence, the sin that has death as its consequence.

A human verdict overturned, once and for all, by God himself, when he raised Jesus from the dead, returning him to heaven, with authority now over the life of the world. His death a sacrifice, for a world that wants to be God.

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.’

The place that Jesus has prepared for us, is eternal life with God. An eternal life that will be perfected, only in our dying. But that is available to us, from the cradle to the grave, but in a partial way. Because

fellowship with God is already available to us now, in this life, as we seek to follow in the way.

The way of self-distinction from God. The self-distinction from God, that Jesus lived out in his life in this world. The self-distinction from God, that Jesus lives out in eternity. An eternal life, a Sonship, that is now open to us. In our rejection of the ways of this world, of wanting to be God, of wanting glory for ourselves. In our living out the way of Jesus, of humble submission to God, of eternal life with God, already now.

‘You know, these are things many of us are uncomfortable speaking about. But to experience them is to be human. And anything human is mentionable. Anything mentionable is manageable. [pause] Anything mentionable is manageable.’

Easter is a powerful time. A time to reflect on what’s important. A time to focus our attention on the love of God, for the world. A love that has now come in Jesus. A love that sends his rain to fall, and his sun to shine, on the just and on the unjust. A love which calls us, to love one another.

In the words of Fred Rogers, ‘It’s a beautiful day in the neighbourhood. It’s a beautiful day for a neighbour. Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won’t you be, my neighbour?’ Goodbye, friend.