

Easter is nearly over! Soon the Easter Garden will be dismantled for another year. This Thursday we shall celebrate the Ascension, then ten days later Pentecost and then the long-summer-green – vestment-Sundays of Trinity and what the church calls Ordinary Time. I do not know about you but in the news and the world around me it does not feel very much as though ordinary time is what we are in for. Extraordinary time seems closer to the mark.

And this week for reasons which will become clear later made I have been thinking about an extraordinary woman: Corrie Ten Boom (pronounced Bohm), a member of the Dutch Resistance during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War, and a great Christian. For those of a certain age and church background you may remember her book *The Hiding Place*, later made into a film. It is a wonderful story. Very briefly, the Boom family home in Haarlem became a safe house for Jews, students and intellectuals sought by the Nazis. But early in 1944 the family were betrayed and sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. Members of Corrie's family died there but Corrie survived.

Now it was not thoughts of European conflict or emigrating to Holland that made Corrie come into my head this week but something she said. Faced with occupation, imprisonment, death Corrie Ten Boom said: Never be afraid in an unknown future to trust a known God.

Never be afraid in an unknown future to trust a known God. And that word for our time is echoed in our readings today. They are truly words in season for us this week.

In our first reading we saw Paul on his mission to share the Good News of Christ in the Gentile world. But doors keep closing for one reason or another and planned journeys into Asia Minor and Southern Europe are thwarted, until Paul receives a vision of a man from Macedonia. Macedonia in Northern Greece is associated in history and by names of cities with one significant man from Macedonia: Alexander the Great. It is possible that Paul identifies the man in his vision with the great leader who conquered the world and is encouraged to win the world for Christ. We do not know, but we do know that he travels to Philippi (named after Alexander's father Philip of Macedon) and shares the Good News with the God-fearing women he finds there. One of these women is Lydia clearly a wealthy merchant who on receiving the message of Christ opens her home to his messengers. In an unknown land Paul trusted God and brought the Good news that was to spread to a world the size Alexander could only have dreamed of. Paul was not afraid to in an unknown future to trust a known God.

Just over 2000 years ago Jesus's disciples found themselves facing an unknown future. They had undergone the despair of the crucifixion and then the overwhelming joy of Jesus's resurrection. During the forty days before his Ascension Jesus must have spent time preparing and counselling his friends on what was to come and reminding them of all he had taught them before world-changing events of that first Holy Week.. In John chapter 14 Jesus reminds his disciples that he will not leave them comfortless. The Holy Spirit, the love of God the Father, the presence of Christ to guide them in all the uncertainties and dangers that lie ahead. And he will give them his peace. In that beautiful verse Jesus says: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

This is the promise to us in our unknown future today. But how can we enter this place of peace. Peace which is not complacency or finding a cosy place to rest our heads under the sand but the active – dynamic -peace that sent Paul to Macedonia and sends us to bring that peace to our world and to build Christ's kingdom?

Well, the answer is in the other half of Corrie's equation. In an unknown future to trust a known God. A known God. I think two things are meant here. The first is that from the beginning of the ages God has acted faithfully to his people and unnumbered witnesses testify to this faithfulness. He is a God to be trusted. But there is a second point here too. How well do we know God? We may know the Bible accounts. We may know our way round a Common Worship service. But how far are our lives ones of true companionship with him? How have we trusted in him and been able to join that mighty witness to his faithfulness to us? How much time do we spend getting to know him? How much of a priority is this relationship in our busy and complex lives?

A verse in our Gospel today is often overlooked – or I admit I had not seen its significance before preparing for today. It comes before the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, before the promise of his peace. It comes at the beginning of the reading we heard this morning. Jesus says: *Those who love me will keep my word and follow my teachings, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.* Love them and make our home with them.

And that is the difference to think about today. The difference between knowing someone as an acquaintance and loving and living with them. The difference it makes when a loved and trusted one reassures and encourages us. When they call us we will recognise their voice and follow them. By getting closer to the God who knows and calls us we find ourselves closer to this promise of his peace.

As with all relationships this closeness will require our time and our attention. The giving of ourselves in prayer, in meeting Christ in the Gospels, keeping his word fresh in our lives, living by his teachings, listening for his voice in our lives. But what it demands of us is as of nothing to all God wants to share with us. My peace I give to you.

This Ascension to Pentecost the Church of England is taking time to listen and to go deeper into this call. You will find some copies of this booklet in the Lady Chapel, or online. It is called *Thy Kingdom Come* and gives the opportunity of ten days of simple prayerful engagement with God and his promises.

It will not tell us about what the immediate future holds but it can help us to know better the one who holds all things in his hands and I cannot think of a better time to do this than now. Let us pray now some words from the Easter Vigil:

Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, all time belongs to you, and all ages; to you be glory through every age and forever. Amen