

Our gospel reading for this morning starts: 'Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.' In other words what Jesus was saying was, 'don't be troubled, believe and put your trust in God and also believe and put your trust in me.'

How relevant are Jesus' words for us today? Well, the times we are living in are very troublesome times. Over the last twelve months, our circumstances have changed dramatically. Oil prices are continuing to rise, VAT has increased to 20%, the UK economy still continues to struggle, shops are closing or finding it difficult to sell as people tighten their belts and spend less. Around a hundred families every day are having their homes re-possessed because they can't afford to pay their mortgage. We read of natural disasters and deaths around the world. For example, the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in early March, the loss of homes and jobs as a result of the flood waters of the Mississippi River in Southern United States and political unrest in North Africa and the Middle East. On top of that, we have our own very specific problems. For some of us, right now may be a great time personally. But others may be going through a very uncertain and difficult time.

Jesus disciples also encountered just such a time in their lives. They had all come from various walks of life before they met Jesus. Maybe for some of them, life was good, and for others life was difficult. But for the past three-and-a-half years that they'd been with Jesus, life had been good. They'd seen countless healings, calming the storm, feeding the 5,000, and even raising the dead. They'd spent the past years listening to the greatest teachings ever spoken. Also, because they expected that Jesus would overthrow the Roman government and set up his kingdom in Jerusalem, they were excited because Jesus had gained popularity and they were on the inside of the movement. I'm not saying that everything was perfect for the disciples, but by-and-large life was fairly good for them. They had no reason to expect that in the very near future all of their expectations and hopes would fall apart. They had no idea of the crisis they were about to be put through, that Jesus would be arrested, beaten, tried, and crucified.

However, Jesus knew what was about to take place, and he wanted to prepare the disciples for what was ahead. In our gospel reading, Jesus explains to them what was about to happen. Previously he had made references to his death, but in a way that they couldn't understand. Now, he wanted them to really understand what he was saying, so he spoke clearly with them. This conversation that Jesus had with them prepared them better to accept the changes and the uncertainty that was about to come upon them.

None of us likes change. None of us likes uncertainty. We're always going to have a certain level of worry when we know that hard times are ahead of us. However, by examining Jesus' conversation with the disciples, we can learn how to get through these times.

Jesus was aware of what lay ahead for his disciples, so he gave them encouragement to help them through. The first thing he says to them is "You believe and trust in God, now believe and trust in me." And this is really the foundation for finding peace to get through difficult times. All of the other things that he said to them were connected to this, 'trust in Him.'. Jesus goes on to explain some of the reasons and the ways that they can trust in Him, but he never really moves beyond 'trust' as the thing that will get them through.

Jesus knew that even if his disciples could trust him, it would be limited trust. So he explained further to them, so that they would see the reasons why they could trust

him and why their trust wouldn't be placed in vain. From these specific answers to that troublesome time, we too can pull out three key points that hopefully will help us to put our trust in God in our uncertain and troublesome times.

Firstly, 'God is in control.' Whatever happens, happens for a reason. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus it would have been easy to forget that God was in control. It may have looked very much like the Roman government or the Jewish leaders were the ones in control. And it may have even seemed that Satan was successfully thwarting the plan of God. Don't forget that the disciples' idea of the Messiah was that he would create a political kingdom in Jerusalem, overthrowing the Roman government. The death of the Messiah didn't fit into their idea. But Jesus explained to them that it was all a part of God's plan. Jesus explained that he had to leave them, but it was for good reason. It was only if he left them that he could prepare heaven for them. In fact, it was only by his death and resurrection that they could even get to heaven.

Another reason that he is going, as he explained later on, was so that he could send the Holy Spirit. Many times in our lives, situations may seem hopeless. We may even question, "Where is God in all this?" We may wonder how anything good could possibly come of our situation. However, we should remember that God works in all things-not just in isolated incidents-for our good. This doesn't mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is widespread in our world but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-term good. It's worth remembering that God isn't working to make us happy but to fulfil His purpose. However, this promise is not for everybody- it can only be claimed by those who love God and are called to serve Him. Those who are called are those the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. They are people who have a new perspective on life. They trust in God, not life's treasures, they look for their security in heaven, not on earth, and they learn to accept, not to resent, because God is with them.

The second key point that we take from our reading this morning is 'we have all that we need in Jesus.' Let me explain. In this setting of confusion, anxiety, and troubled hearts, Jesus made the claim. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: No-one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus' reply to Thomas was personal in that He didn't just claim to know the way, the truth and the life as a formula he could impart--but he actually claimed to be the answer to human problems. Jesus' solution isn't a recipe, it's about developing a personal and intimate relationship with Him. As we get to know Jesus better, we develop the trust we need to believe him. He is the 'way' to the Father because he has knowledge of God, unmarred by human sin. He is the 'truth' because he has the power to make life one coherent experience in spite of its ups and downs. He is 'life' because he was not subject to death but made it subject to Him. We can trust Jesus who is the 'way' not only to eternal life but who is the 'way out' of our despair. It is not just a belief for the future but for right now as well.

Far too often in life we become completely focused on the trials and difficulties of life and we lose our focus on Jesus. When Peter walked on the water towards Jesus, he was doing well until he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the waves. The same is true of us today. Jesus can get us through the most impossible situations, but we must keep our focus and trust in Him.

The third and final point is that 'we are not left alone.' If we read the next two verses of John's gospel, verses 15 and 16, we would find that Jesus promised his disciples that even though he himself had to go, he would send 'Another Counsellor.' In other words, He would send the Holy Spirit to them. So today, we have the very presence of God, everywhere at once, in the form of the Holy Spirit. This was made possible by Jesus leaving the earth. One of the last things that Jesus said to his disciples before he left this earth was 'be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

Shortly after Jesus said this He ascended into heaven. There may have been a question at that time in the minds of the disciples: Didn't he say he would never leave us? But the fact is that it was right after Jesus left that the Holy Spirit came. The presence of Christ is no longer limited by space and time, but Christ is still very present on this earth and very present in our lives.

So to conclude, it's precisely because we can trust in God to get us through our difficult and troublesome times: trust that he is in control; trust that we have all that we need in Jesus; and trust that he will never leave us, that Jesus later on in John, Chapter 14, could say 'I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.'

Amen

John 14 vs 1-14

5th Sunday of Easter: 22nd May 2011.