**Easter in Isolation**

It’s Maundy Thursday and I’ve just Zoomed a Maundy Thursday Service with over 300 colleagues in Newcastle Diocese. We were all in our homes and we were live streamed! People from the diocese worked really hard to put this service together so that it could happen online. It was the Chrism Mass, (no blessing of oils or communion though) which happens every Maundy Thursday, and gives an opportunity for all to think about their Baptism promises and clergy to think about their ordination vows.

Bishop Christine led the service and Bishop Mark gave a talk from the reading Luke 7:36-50. He spoke about the exuberant extravagance of the woman who wept tears over Jesus’ feet, wiped them with her hair and then poured an alabaster jar of ointment on Jesus’ feet. Bishop Mark asked us to try to put ourselves in the story and consider what our feelings might be. He said he might have had a fit of the giggles observing this…. and maybe even been a bit embarrassed. He then went on to think about how the woman herself had no embarrassment because of the gratitude and love that she felt towards Jesus. It made me think about the love that Jesus poured out on the cross and to ask: how grateful are we?

Over this week Jamie and I have been stopping whatever we are doing at 6pm, reading the set passages for the day and then reflecting on the readings. We had read about the woman with the alabaster jar on Monday and reflected that our worship doesn’t come anywhere near hers. We asked ourselves why we hold back in our worship and our lives – is it because we don't really grasp the extent of Jesus’ love? Bishop Mark went further by reminding us that even an extravagant display of love like that of the woman is only the merest glimpse of the love that Jesus pours out for us on the cross and in his resurrection.

I thought that, if Bishop Mark was saying a similar thing to Jamie and me, then maybe this was the work of the Holy Spirit!

At one point of the service today all the groups who were there renewed their commitment in turn – Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Readers and Lay Ministers. Everyone then joined in the commitment of all of the Baptised.

The words that were asked of me and other clergy were:

“At your ordination to the priesthood, you took authority to watch over and care for God’s people, to absolve and bless them in his name, to proclaim the gospel of salvation and to minister the sacraments of his New Covenant.

Will you continue as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, preaching the Gospel of Christ and ministering the holy sacraments?”

Our response was “with the help of God, I will”

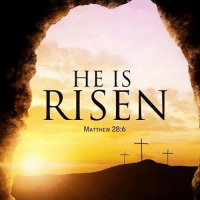
As I held my Bible and renewed my commitment as your priest here in Newburn Parish , I was overcome with emotion – I felt so alone. There are people in our parish going through really difficult times, which is always happening, but I have taken for granted throughout my ministry that I could go and support people. I’m a really tactile person, I celebrate the beginning of life with hugs and the end of lives with hugs and tears and prayers, and now I can’t do that in quite the same way.. there is something missing in my life… I can’t go and be the priest that I want to be.

Thinking about how Bishop Mark encouraged us to imagine ourselves in the scene is particularly pertinent at the present time because there are so many situations where we can only be observers. That is difficult for so many of us and difficult for me because I don’t want to be an observer; I want to participate in the joy, in the mess, in the rubbish and pain of people’s lives.

But maybe one thing that we should be doing is to reflect on how we might participate once this time of isolation is over. Bishop Mark asked what new ways of ministry will there be, what will my ministry be like post Covid 19? Similarly, I would like to ask you: what new ways of worshipping God can you find post Covid 19, what new ways of giving him all that you have to offer? The woman in the story kissed Jesus with her tears, she poured out all that she had for him. Will we do the same?

Similarly, when we think about the kiss of love that Jesus offers to this broken and hurting world, will we be ready to bring his love, his hope and his joy extravagantly and exuberantly to those who don’t know him? Will we be ready to find new ways to do this?

While we can’t kiss and hug each other this weekend, we can receive the kiss of Jesus and be enveloped in his arms. We can also get ready to come together and celebrate when it is safe to do so. But let’s allow God to change us, let’s allow his Holy Spirit to make us different. Let’s hold things more lightly and people more tightly, let’s be ready to shout form the roof tops about this man of love who died to save us and let us remember the greatest news in history …



God Bless You All

Love Allison x