

## **Sermon 7th May 2017. Acts 2:42-47, 1 Peter 2: 19-25 and John 10:1-10.**

“Day by day as they spent much time together in the temple.” We have the opportunity to come together every day to worship, just as the people in this reading did. We have services everyday apart from Tuesday, so that just as it is written in acts we can come together to remember and celebrate. Most of us don’t take the opportunity to come every day, we have other things to do, work, family etc. Are we missing out on fellowship if we don’t come together daily? Probably not because I am sure that we all pray and read scripture at some point on a daily basis. This may happen in private, but I take comfort in the fact that somewhere else in the world, there may be other people reading scripture and praying at the same time. I don’t mind if these people are not of the same faith as me, it is just wonderful to think that we can be a community of people worshipping a higher power in whatever place and whatever language we speak. When we take time to study the scriptures, and what they mean for us they can help shape us, and show us how we can live our lives today. When reflecting on these passages we can learn how to live in community with those whom we disagree. I also like to think that those who are praying at the same time are praying for peace to be found not just in our own lives but in the lives and communities of all people, in all places.

Fellowship can also be about giving and sharing, all that we own with others who have nothing. Yes this can refer to financial giving, but doesn’t it also refer to the gift of the spirit that burns brightly within each of us, isn’t it our duty to share with others in a gentle way the message of the kingdom of God. At a time when the world is in turmoil and doesn’t feel a very stable place to live, it is good that we can come together with other people of all faiths to spread the message of God. This isn’t a time to get caught up in liturgical differences, or gaining bragging rights to whose God is better, it is in fact time that we set aside such petty differences and learnt to live in the spirit of the commandment Jesus gave to us the commandment of love. If we do this then our church can only grow and flourish, when we stand in awe of a God who loves us in spite of our faults, who still loves humankind in spite of the devastation we have wrought on the world he created, then we are truly blessed and can present ourselves as a community who are truly on the road to bringing people into a relationship with Christ. The church at the very beginning was about being faithful in its teaching, active in sharing, devoted to praying and worshipping together and exuberant in its praise of God. Some would say the churches of today have lost their way. I would say it is time to come together under one umbrella of love for our fellow human beings and leave God to take care of the rest, after all only he truly knows what he wants and expects of us.

Our reading from Peter is quite difficult to understand, if we are treated harshly or unfairly even when we have done nothing wrong then we should just accept it. We should not retaliate, just accept our punishment just as Jesus did. In the modern world this can prove very difficult to do. When we are faced with the loss of a loved one through tragic circumstances, it must be very difficult not to want to retaliate. If we do retaliate then does that make us any better than the one who committed the original crime? Probably not, in fact we may be more at fault because we have had time to think and pray about our actions before we act upon them. It is only when we reach a point that we can begin to forgive those that have harmed us and try to find a way to

love our enemies that we can begin to lift the burden that has been put upon us. I am not suggesting that we forget when we have been treated harshly or unfairly, or even when we lose someone in tragic circumstances but that we should learn how to forgive those who caused us harm. The world will be a much better place when we begin to preach love and forgiveness instead of hatred and retaliation. Easy for me to stand here and say, not so easy to put into practice. The first place we need to start the journey of forgiveness is with ourselves. When we can examine our own consciences and ask for forgiveness for our own wrong doings, then we can begin to forgive others for theirs. Hard lessons to learn and accept? Yes but who said a life of faith was meant to be easy?

Jesus is the shepherd, the gateway to God. He is the one who brings security and freedom. He is the only way to enter into the kingdom. When we accept Christ as saviour we are given the security of knowing that we have the opportunity to gain eternal life. We are also given the freedom to worship in a way that helps us to find faith, faith that will sustain us throughout our journey in this life. I struggle sometimes with a church that is so tied up in disagreements and telling us what is right and wrong that I sometimes feel we lose the message that was given to us all those years ago. Jesus was and is the good shepherd, sent to find those that are lost, to put them on the right path and lead them to other people who share the same beliefs. Jesus did not come to give us man made religion, he did not come to say that one way of worshipping is right, one source of liturgy is right. Jesus came to tell us to mix with those on the edges of society the people we probably wouldn't invite to come and have dinner with us, the rapist, murderers and petty thieves; and yet this is what Jesus did. There are many Christian communities and leaders who covet power and money and pride themselves on how wealthy their church is. This is not what God intended. I am sure God wouldn't mind if we met in a pub and worshipped there, every Sunday. We have to get away from the image that a successful church is a wealthy church in terms of monetary value. In my eyes a wealthy church is one that allows its community to journey together in faith, that encompasses all people and that does not stand in judgement of those less well off than themselves or those with a criminal past. A wealthy church is one that, allows people to find faith and not religion, lives out its faith through the gospel of love and opens its arms to all people and gives them a big hug that leaves them feeling full of the power of the holy spirit and wanting to know more about this man who was born to be their saviour.

Amen