*Acts 7:55-60, Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16.. 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14*

Listening to our readings this morning, I found myself wondering how different members of the congregation here today might be hearing them. Often we listen just as individuals. What is this saying to me? What does it offer me for my life and my future? Or we may listen as members of a close-knit community - our family, our work colleagues or our immediate interest group - or even our nation: How does God's word today help us to relate to one another, relieve our anxiety and show us the way forward?

 It is probably much rarer to listen as members of the vast community of humanity worldwide - of what more that 60 years ago was first called "the global village", as electronic mass communication began to burgeon. But let's consider it.

 Given the threat to human life and well-being in this time of accelerating climate breakdown, murderous wars and threats of war, natural disasters and ever-increasing migration from destitute countries to inhospitable ones - perhaps it's as citizens of that "global village" that we need to listen most attentively. In this time when creation itself seems to be disintegrating around us, must we not join in the widest possible community to repair and sustain it?

 Stephen's martyrdom resulted from his fresh and life-affirming interpretation of God's activity in Jewish history, disrespecting the legalism and control of the Temple scribes, and accusing them of complicity in Jesus' crucifixion. Their reprisal was immediate. After committing his Spirit to Jesus' care, Stephen died praying forgiveness for his murderers just as Jesus had done, with his "Father forgive them, they know not what they do."

 Might this be a lesson to us all that forgiveness and mercy is a divine quality to be emulated, even at the point of death? A suggestion that our constant demands for retribution and punishment of wrong-doers is not of God? That mercy should season justice?

 Moving on to Peter's encouragement to new believers to be "living stones", attached to the cornerstone of God's house which is Christ: might the "spiritual sacrifices" we offer to God consist of showing mercy to those around us just as we have received mercy, that He may bring all humanity from darkness to light? As creatures of flesh and spirit, made in God's image to reflect his marvellous light, can we imagine that anything less is asked of us?

 Being followers of Jesus today must surely mean more than being members of a holy huddle of the "saved". We are called to be prodigal sharers of God's love and provision with the people of the whole global village - in its back streets, its barren, famine-stricken places and storm-ravaged hillsides, not only where we might be more comfortable. It is by embodying Jesus' love, as living stones in God's house, not by declaiming creeds and commandments, that we may hope eventually to come with all humanity into fullness of life in Him.

 And so we come to the gospel - a gospel delicately balanced between this world and the next, offering assurance to the fearful and an invitation to "the Father's house" to all who trust in God's help for the journey beyond our sight. This passage from Jesus' farewell discourse to his troubled disciples is for that reason commonly read at funerals, and most of us tend to approach it from an individual perspective, aware that we too will be making this journey in due course.

 But what if we read it as members of the global village? Immediately the "many dwelling places" of God's house come into focus, and we may recall that in yesterday's coronation service the representatives of many world faiths were specifically welcomed. We could also reflect that the command to "believe" might be better translated as encouragement to *TRUST;* to trust in the Love that created us and holds us all in being, made flesh in Jesus and working always to fill each one of us to overflowing - if only we trust.

#  Jesus is "the way", because he is God's love incarnate. He is in the Father and the Father is in him; so as we cling to his example and open ourselves more deeply to his presence we too can be inhabited more and more by God's Love. In the global village, the whole earthly community of those made to reflect God's being, there are many systems of belief, or "faiths" as we call them; but in the light of this passage we can see all of them as pathways to the divine - approaching goodness, truth and beauty from their own location, their own culture and historical background - like paths to a mountain-top from different points of the compass.

 In the world of two thousand years ago, maybe even two hundred years ago, this would have been unthinkable. But in our global village we have learned to find goodness and truth where before we saw only error or idolatry; and we have become aware that we Christians too can have our idols - power, wealth, or just the familiarity of our own prejudices. We have begun to see that all religious systems, even our own, can become rigid and restrictive, just as had the Judaism of Jesus' day, and to admit the need always to seek renewal and a deeper awareness of the divine, whatever our particular branch of faith.

 "I have other sheep who are not of this fold," Jesus said, when speaking of himself as the Good Shepherd earlier in this Gospel. "Them too I must bring in, and there will be one flock and one shepherd". Spending time in Bede Griffiths' ashram in South India long ago, I found this promise being fulfilled as Sanskrit chants, formerly used in Hindu worship, were routinely sung at the start of each service, and occasionally passages from the Bhagavad Gita and the Koran were used as the first reading at the Eucharist. I was reminded of Eusebius' designation of sacred texts from other faith traditions as "Preparation for the Gospel", along with the Hebrew Bible. It was here too that I learned of the "unknown Christ of Hinduism", proclaimed in 1964 by the Spanish philosopher priest, Raimon Pannikar.

 And back in Dublin, much more recently, it has been good to see the foundation and flourishing of the Dublin City Inter-Faith Forum, of which our own Archbishop is a leading member, providing regular stimulus for respectful inter-faith conversation and presentations.

 So much for the "many mansions" of eternal bliss. What of Jesus' further commands? Beyond belief in Jesus' coinherence with the Father, the command here is for action. Belief in Jesus' "works" as proof of his identity should lead to our doing "works even greater than these". The works are not specified, but on the pattern of Jesus' lifetime, they must be works of healing, provision of what is needed, and demonstration of God's love.

 Read in a global context, the challenge to us as a country in the Northern hemisphere, is nothing short of enormous. Are we willing to live simply that others may simply live? Apart from our typically Irish welcome for Ukrainian refugees, there is little sign that we are. Neither our administrative structures or our trade unions show much sign of the altruism, or the "works", that are mandatory for Christians, even within the country, where nearly 12,000 people are now homeless. And while it's good to read of Irish ships rescuing migrants drowning in the Mediterranean, as seen from space this must be deemed a mere drop in the ocean.

 What percentage of our GNP is allotted to foreign aid? On googling the query this week I found that last year for the first time we allotted over a billion euro to overseas development aid; but this would still be less than .5% of our GNP. No doubt agencies such as Christian Aid and Trocaire, to which most of us contribute, bring the figure up somewhat, but looking at our standard of living compared to the devastation of famine-stricken countries in Africa and the Middle East, the stark challenge remains.

 Considering our global village from another angle, I have returned recently to the inspiring work of Teilhard de Chardin and his theory of human evolution. Written in the 1950s, with reference to now outdated scientific thinking, it is no longer as persuasive as it was. But even so, his vision is exciting, pointing as it does to an ideal of humanity growing progressively closer together and closer to God.

 Christogenesis - becoming "in-Christ" - is the term he uses for his vision of humanity's future, as we approach a final threshold for our species - after which we would indeed inhabit a new heaven and a new earth.

 Such things as dreams are made on? Perhaps. But unless we can move strongly in that direction, and act accordingly, the outlook is not as Christ promised his disciples it would be. Far from it.

 Let us, then, as a starting point, at least hang on to Jesus' core command: "That you love one another, as I have loved you... I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and your fruit should abide. This is my command: that you love one another."

 May we extend that love to all humanity, not just our personal circle and fellow worshippers in this cathedral. We are called to live in Christ as he lives in us, that we may be one, even as He and the Father are one, reaching out in love and mercy and generosity to all people, all creation. Let us pray in silence for a moment, that we may more and more obey that call . . . .

 Lord in your mercy . . . **Hear our prayer.**

 Canon Ginnie Kennerley - 7.5.2023