

Dear friends,

One of the books I'm reading at the moment is *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope* penned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. The book proves a stimulating read, as the Archbishop examines some of the building blocks of our shared society, namely education, housing and healthcare (both physical and mental) and asks how they can be 'reimagined' at a time of great change and transition for multicultural Britain. As you would expect, the Archbishop does this through the lens of the Christian faith, and shows how the story of Jesus Christ – crucified, resurrected and ascended – can offer hope and purpose in the midst of political, social and international turmoil. This is essential, the Archbishop argues, since the good news of the gospel of Jesus is fundamentally concerned with 'restored relationships' both with God and our neighbour, which thus enables us, as those who trust in God, to examine the way we live with integrity and humility in faith, hope and love. This is expressed for Christians in the concept of 'love-in-action', which the Archbishop notes is the focus for any true understanding of human flourishing and development.

Fundamentally, it means of course that the Church has a vital role to play: firstly, in speaking and acting in a way coherent with seeking to bring light and healing, and secondly that the people of God take seriously the call to be a blessing to those places where we live. As Justin Welby notes, 'obedience to God is seen in imitation of God, and thus in love for those in the world around and in care for the concerns of God...a way of life which witnesses to the truth of Christ in words, but also in advocacy, action and sacrifice'.

It is perhaps fitting to read those words in these Eastertide days, where from the cross and the empty tomb we seek to live lives that speak of God's loving power revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The length of the Easter season, being fifty days up to the feast of Pentecost, reminds us that the hope of Easter isn't simply a truth to be known but a way of life to be experienced and lived. In our lectionary readings we hear the gospel stories of the risen Lord's encounters with his disciples following his rising from the dead, alongside the account given in the Acts of the Apostles of how the nascent Christian Church began proclaiming in word and deed the resurrection of Jesus. It reminds us that all that we do for the Kingdom in the here-and-now is a continuation of the great work begun over two thousand years ago, when the apostles, transformed by the reality of the resurrection, were sent out to speak to the world the good news of God. The task of 'reimagining' that our Archbishop speaks of has been ongoing ever since – offering the challenge and transformation that comes from an outworking of the deep trust and faith we have in the promises of the gospel. This work doesn't just belong to a certain group of people, but to all who believe Jesus was raised from the dead.

This fits well, I think, with the feast of the Ascension that we will celebrate on Thursday 10th May, forty days after Easter Day, when Jesus bearing the marks of his death and passion ascended back into heaven to complete the work begun by his incarnation of reconciling all things and all people to God. In doing so, the Ascension reminds us in those words which conclude St Matthew's gospel, that Jesus is 'with us always, even to the end of the age', and that all we do now is begun, continued and ended in the Lord who not only abides with us, but commissions us for his service. May we this month be given the grace and wisdom to not only hear but to act upon those words, that we might be partners and sharers of Christ's ongoing work of reimagining and transforming the world that God loves so much.

With every good wish and prayer for God's blessing,

Andrew