

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Easter 2020. Rogation Sunday.

Hosea 6:1-3 1 Romans 8 18-27. Psalm 145:15-21. John 16:23b-33.

The Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Rogation Sunday is a time of thanksgiving for the planting of seeds and for the anticipation of a future harvest. That should always be a maxim for how we should lead our lives as Christians. Always, sow, do so in expectancy, and anticipate a bumper crop. What a contrast that is to the very common Tony Hancock approach; full of anxiety and foreboding. The prophet Hosea's words come to us from the mid to late 8th Century BC, and from an agricultural society. His personal life was fraught with difficulties, particularly with respect to unfaithful relationships in his own family and in the people of Israel forsaking God. Yet, despite all, God would continue to forgive those who repent and turn back to Him so He could heal their inner sickness. Please do read the portions of scripture noted above and sent out in the other file. Also, have a look at this very short video, which is an overview of the Book of Hosea:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kE6SZ1ogOVU>

St Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans writes in 8:18 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.' This portion from St Paul in our Book of Common Prayer Lectionary, links with the theme of Rogation, promising 'first fruits of the Spirit,' and seeds planted in creation that groan as they come to flourish at harvest time. Paul had suffered a great deal because of his work as an Evangelist. He had been reviled, beaten up, imprisoned, physically injured, and at one point left for dead. But it didn't stop him getting up, brushing himself down, and trying again. Hosea had a bad time, Paul had a bad time, James the brother of Jesus got executed, Peter likewise, and so the story goes on; even to the present day in all parts of the world. Christians can 'sow in tears and reap in joy.' (Psalm 126:5,6). We know that our brothers and sisters in India, for example, are under serious pressure because of the state's drive to unify the country under the mantle of Hinduism. Some suffer very badly indeed. Yet, they have

experienced the inner joy of knowing God for themselves, and do not revile their accusers.

Here we all are, inconvenienced and possibly very anxious, with good economic or health-related reason. There may be no money coming in to pay the bills and put food on the table. We may be ill and at high risk should we contract the virus. To 'sow in tears' meant to take the grain that might have made our last loaf of bread out to broadcast on the ground, not knowing whether it would survive long enough to root and bring forth new shoots. But the promise of a faithful God is that there will be joy at the harvest. Jesus tells his disciples, in the portion from John's gospel, that they will have fullness of joy if they ask the Father for something in Jesus' name. That's what gives a Christian the courage to live in hopeful anticipation of joy. We trust Jesus, we put up with suffering, and we let the Holy Spirit intercede for us (Romans 8:26) in our weakness, not even knowing what we ought to pray. Here our translations often say the Spirit 'helps' us, but the Greek implies more than that, namely that he 'takes a share in' our weakness. God, in reality, is not a bystander!

So, it's Rogation Sunday, and we keep on planting seeds knowing that there are times when we are not as faithful as we should be. Maybe we have forgotten the times when God generously blessed our meagre efforts in the past? We are told that God is: 'wont to give more than either we desire or deserve,' and 'our conscience is afraid,' because we know we are sinners and haven't asked for absolution of our sins. In short, we aren't very good disciples and God would be well within His rights to leave us to stew. But, that's why He is in charge and not us!

Maybe this is indeed an hour that 'has come, when you will be scattered, every many to his own home, and will leave (Jesus) alone' (John 16:32). Yet, Jesus says (33): 'In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' He has not left us alone, but is sharing the discomfiture of Christians by the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can keep sowing seeds of hope, in the joyful anticipation of an harvest to come. Read your Gospel; therein are words to sow. God's Word does not return empty to Him (Isaiah 55:11). But, neither does He expect us to sit back moping. Let's do as He says and 'Cheer up'!

Christ is risen. Alleluia.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.