



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

“Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled”

Easter 5 – Sunday 3 May 2026

John 14 1-14

The Revd Canon Jane Richards

Diocesan Lead Advisor for Training and CMD Advisor for Barking Episcopal Area

Jesus said “do not let your hearts be troubled” In times such as these it’s hard not to be troubled. Our world feels ever more broken. We are bombarded by news from around the world and indeed nearer to home that is challenging to process, that makes it hard not to be downhearted, not to lose hope.

How do we as Christians, as Easter people, bring the Gospel message of transformation to those who are immersed in the conflict that threatens their very existence. What do we have to offer to those for whom every day is a struggle.

The first section of this week’s reading from John’s Gospel is one with a very pastoral focus and often forms part of the liturgy at funerals as we seek to be reassured that those we mourn are in a place of beauty and peace.

“In my Father’s house there are many rooms”. We often consider this as a description of Heaven, the idea that each of us has a special place in God’s kingdom that He has prepared for us. The analogy of a house with rooms is comforting and familiar and I firmly believe in the truth of those words in terms of the welcome we will receive when our lives on this earth come to an end.

However, I would also like to suggest that we can reflect on Jesus’s words in the context of God’s kingdom here on earth in the present moment. We are part of His mission to grow that kingdom and to build that house now, wherever we may find ourselves, to create communities which exude the unconditional love of God, where all are welcome, where there is a place for everyone regardless of any of the barriers that we have constructed which exclude those we have the audacity to judge as unworthy of inclusion in the Body of Christ.

As we move through the passage it is perhaps the latter half that challenges us most. Here the focus shifts to the need to reflect on the depth of our belief that Jesus is of the Father.

As we see on a number of occasions throughout all four Gospels here we have another example of a disciple, in this case Philip, asking for visual proof of God the Father - “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”.

Jesus’s response is one of patient disappointment - “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time?”

Despite all that Philip has seen, all that he has heard, he does not yet seem able to accept that Jesus is indeed of the Father, He is God incarnate, the culmination of the prophecies spoken throughout Jewish scripture. But Philip needs more than that - he wants to see God the Father for himself, he has yet to fully understand who Jesus truly is. Philip does not yet have the faith required of him if he is to be an instrument for kingdom work.

Jesus tells the disciples that everything that he says and does is through the presence of the divine within him, he reminds them of the miracles they have witnessed, he promises them even greater things that will come through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The context in which Jesus is speaking to the disciples might feel very different to our contemporary experience, but I would suggest that his words remain as relevant now as they did then.

The world is still broken, peace remains elusive, justice is absent. We fear the stranger as much as Jesus's community did, we continue to fail to love our neighbour as were commanded to do. We continue to pray thy kingdom come.

The love that Jesus shows is certainly the love of the Father but, limited by his human nature, it is only the faintest image of the full reality of that love. That is why Jesus calls himself the Way; he is the Way not the End. The Father is the end and the culmination of all living.

Jesus, in his time here on earth, was limited in what he could accomplish. He lived in one very small place, he probably spoke only one, maybe two languages; he reached relatively few people, and he was only intimate with a small number.

Yet those limitations were cast aside through Jesus's death and resurrection. The power of the Gospel breaks down the barriers of language and geography. It creates connection and relationship through which transformation changes lives and communities.

Today we have the means of communication to bring the message of Jesus to great numbers. Jesus, now in his risen Body, the Church, can indeed "do far greater things". This was made possible by his going back to the Father and passing on his work into our hands. Given all the resources we have at our disposal, we have a significant responsibility to do that "greater work".

But in order to be part of that response we must be resolute in our belief of who Jesus truly is. We must believe in Jesus as the Son of the Father. We must accept his divinity, be grateful for his radical act on the Cross and know without doubt that He did rise again from death that we may have eternal life. That is the bottom line - without that level of faith we cannot call ourselves disciples of Jesus.

How often do people say to you that there is no need to go to church, that there are good and kind people who exemplify Christian values yet aren't an active part of a Christian community.

Now I don't doubt the fundamental goodness of such people, and I thank God for them, the world would be a much harder place without them but being a Christian is not just about being a good and kind person.

Yes that is hugely important. It is vital that Christian values guide everything we do. But being a Christian is being devoted to Jesus, it is about declaring our belief in His incarnation, his life on earth, his death and his resurrection, it is about putting him at the centre of everything we do. It is only through our faith in him that we can truly come before the Father and participate in his mission on earth.

As a Diocese we not only journey through the Easter season, we also continue our journey through the 100 days of prayer. Over last week and into the next our focus has been on stewardship in its widest sense. We give thanks to God for the gifts and talents he has bestowed on us, we seek his wisdom on how we best use these for his glory and we reflect on what generosity means in all its forms if we are to immerse ourselves on the mission we have been called to be part of.

He does call us out of the ordinary, He calls us to live distinctively and counter culturally, to reflect Kingdom values in all that we do.

To do the work of the Gospel requires sacrifice at both an individual and a community level. That sacrifice will look different for each of us and for each parish, but we cannot shy away from it.

Jesus says "Anything you ask me in my name I will do."

To pray in his name is not just to use his name like a talisman or charm. When invoke the name of Jesus we also fully identify ourselves with his Way and his will.

It is not an invitation to make any kind of arbitrary request to suit our own personal whims. Primarily, it is to ask his help in spreading his Gospel. It is to listen intently to what he is asking of us, however uncomfortable that may be. It is to ask for courage to make difficult decisions in the knowledge that in the hardest of times God has our best interests in heart.

Last week I had the privilege of attending a service of commemoration for Erev Yom HaShoah at a local synagogue. Through prayer and liturgy, those gathered remembered the victims of the holocaust. These words, discovered inscribed on the wall of a cellar in Cologne where Jews had hidden, in particular struck me as a prayer which sums up the essence of hope and belief.

"I believe in the sun....even when it is not shining

I believe in love....even when feeling it not

I believe in God...even when God is silent"

Jesus said "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me"

Amen