

Oakridge Baptist Church – Mothering Sunday Service – 22nd March 2020

Reading: John 14:1-21 (*New International Version*)

¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

Sermon: "I will not leave you as orphans"

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that you would open your words of life to us and make our understanding of your ways fruitful, for your name's sake, **Amen.**

Just a short time ago, the world was a place of us and them with various coalitions engaged in battle across various fronts with many civilians bearing the brunt of the chaos; children suffering malnutrition; refugees fleeing and making dangerous water crossings, the Greek authorities pushing back refugees coming across the border from Turkey and a developing epidemic in China. It is less than a month since war; refugees and climate change were the preoccupations of nation states and news media.

Last year, most people hadn't heard of coronaviruses; those viruses that cause common colds, influenza and other respiratory illnesses and not the electronic ones that mess up your computer. When a new coronavirus was discovered in

China in December 2019 and then the world became vaguely aware in January 2020, the fact that it was called a coronavirus stuck, just like Hoover became the generic name for any vacuum cleaner.

In January, a handful of Chinese people succumbed to the virus either in China or in parts of the world to where they had travelled. It was only on 23rd January that Wuhan was quarantined and by the end of the month Hubei province was also quarantined. On 30th January the WHO declared a global public-health emergency; but for us this was still a news story of them and not us as it was really just a “Chinese” problem with a bit of overspill through travelling (seemingly proven by the USA’s ban on arrivals of people who had been in China for a fortnight). In the UK, refugees on the Greek border and Brexit Day were still our highest priorities.

On 11th February, the new “coronavirus” got a name, COVID-19, although I prefer Covid19 because it is easier to type. It was still a Chinese problem when somebody discovered on 12th February that somebody from China had infected a church in South Korea the previous weekend.

But just a week later Covid19 was in Iran – that country which has been implicated in the Syrian and Yemen wars which got us worried about starving children and the possibility of refugees overwhelming us. Just two days later on 21st February it became an “Italian” problem. By 8th March, Italy was in health service meltdown and the country was shut down. On 11th March the WHO declared a pandemic as Covid19 had invaded the rest of the world.

When the USA declared a national emergency on 13th March, just 9 days ago, we were just beginning to recognise that this was really serious. And last week, the world as we know it started shutting down.

On Tuesday all religious groups were told to stop their gatherings. People were advised to stop mingling. On Wednesday we were told that schools are to close indefinitely and that all theatres, cinemas and other entertainment facilities were to close. On Friday, every possible place where people could gather was shut down; pubs, restaurants and leisure centres. Everybody was advised to stay at home unless it was necessary to be out, to exercise alone outdoors and preferably to avoid going out at all if possible.

We all had an inkling something was coming when shops ran out of toilet paper then pasta then flour a fortnight ago. This week, the country as a whole shut down except for essential workers and the government made financial commitments that will affect the lives and livelihoods of perhaps two generations.

But as a world, we had already forgotten, in a fortnight, that nation states were natural rivals for political and economic ascendancy. Instead, the world's problems of us and them, of refugees and starving, had seemingly ceased to exist as the whole world was brought to its knees by something it couldn't even see...

Two thousand years ago, Rome ruled the world with an iron fist and people sought solace in their gods. For Israel, that proud nation which worshipped the One and only true God, being subjugated by the heathen was a fate perhaps worse than death and they sought the promised Messiah, the solution to all their

troubles, who would come and give them world domination, wiping out their enemies with little more than a word, or so they thought...

Sure, a Messiah had come, but had failed to deliver what they thought he ought. Even one of his closest companions thought he could force his rabbi's hand by betrayal; to force him to destroy the enemies who came to arrest him. But both paid the ultimate price.

The Messiah knew this was coming when he confided in his friends: "18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." The death of the Messiah at the hands of the Romans wasn't part of the Jewish mind-set; how could the victor over all be defeated? But orphans they would be, at least for a weekend...

When we were younger – and I pray God's peace over you whose lives were denied this comfort and assurance by not having a mother you knew or a mother that could care for you as every child has a right to expect – when we who enjoyed this privilege were younger, there was no distress in the world that Mum didn't have a solution to. Mum knew how to protect us from harm; Mum knew how to alleviate our distress; Mum was the answer to all the difficulties of a child's world...

And Jesus was the answer to the worldview of his disciples... until the earth was shaken beneath their feet and the One who had become everything to them: father, mother, teacher, miracle worker, Messiah, was destroyed by created beings; ones who had been made at his word and by his hands, says John at the beginning of his account...

Two thousand years ago, Jesus showed the world a way of life in which everybody could live together in peace and await an eternal relationship with their creator in a place of perfect comfort and safety that was being prepared especially for those who trusted in his words: ¹ "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

But Jesus had to suffer and die to go to that place and nothing has changed except the hope of resurrection demonstrated by Jesus that makes eternal life in his company a reality. The problem we all face, the problem that Mum could never solve, was that all of us would ultimately be destroyed by a seen or unseen enemy. Jesus didn't bypass the destroyer, but went boldly to face that enemy and paid the ultimate price for the redemption of humankind. By God's grace, that fate was not permanent and by God's grace, victory is not only possible, but guaranteed for those who trust his Word.

We will all become orphans at some time except for those who predecease their parents against the apparent natural order. Many of us can testify to that kind of loss within our families, which serves as a sad reminder that humankind is not invincible; not in control of our ultimate destiny, but that we depend on our creator and those tasked with our nurture to guide us to the place of eternal comfort. Jesus promised that he would not leave us as orphans – indeed, he is alive and preparing that place for us where Covid19 and any other life-limiting enemy have no part in God's eternal future. And because he is alive Jesus has

tasked the third person of the Godhead with being our nurturer, our Godly Mum from here to eternity: ¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

Folk, Covid19 has brought the world to its knees, figuratively, and we have the opportunity to respond literally from our knees as we pray that Covid19 will not have its way even if some of us get to the place prepared by Jesus before we intended. Jesus' resurrection is the proof that Jesus will have the last word... ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

With confidence in Christ's ultimate victory, let's obey Jesus' command to live in sacrificial love as he did; preferring others above ourselves. There really is no need for panic buying. The Covid19 pandemic and humankind's response to it has led to the skies above the world's most polluting countries becoming clear and starry. Marine life is frolicking in the once rancid canals of Venice. The earth is still producing the same amount of food as before. Dairy cows still produce their milk. So let's love one another by only taking for ourselves what we need. Let's show love by meeting the needs of those who are in isolation due to infirmity or because they are ill. For those of us who have yet to encounter Covid19, let's be fastidious with our hygiene and minimise the chances of spreading it to those whose lives may be more at risk. And for those who have suddenly encountered

real poverty, let's lobby those who have the power to lift that burden to do so and where we can help, let's do so too.

The earth now has the unique opportunity to become one race, the human race, no longer fracturing into one another's enemies, but bound together in solidarity as we search for the means to stop the unseen enemy of us all.

Pray: Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus did not leave us as orphans, but rose again and ascended to heaven, alive forevermore. We pray that as we human beings come together against a common enemy, such a small part of creation, but with the power to shut the world down like never before in history, that our eyes would be on Christ, the ultimate victor over death and destruction. As he has commanded, let us like him show sacrificial love for the sake of humankind, not self or tribe or nation, for we are all made complete in him. Please cast out all doubt and fear and help us never to forget that you are sovereign over all creation, even Covid19, **Amen.**