

**Sermon on Sunday 24 May 2020 at 10am and 11 am Eucharist
by Zoom**

John 17 v.1-11

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are going through a time of intense and anxious yearning. Songs such as *We'll meet again*, with all its poignant hopefulness, are brought out of retirement to express our feelings and our hopes, a strange and potent mixture of sadness for what has been lost and hope for a brighter future.

We have been here before, and we have had songs before to console our troubled souls, and express our yearnings for a brighter future.

'Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.'

It's quite an old song. Judy Garland's great recording as the young heroine, Dorothy, in *The Wizard of Oz* was made over 80 years ago, in 1939. A time when the world had for years been suffering great economic hardship following the collapse of the global financial structure. A time of the great depression, with unemployment and bankruptcy leading to homelessness and broken relationships, broken lives. A time also of fear of what might lie ahead. A time when the individual man and woman seemed as helpless as their children to influence the juggernaut of terrible events. At our worst moments we must feel that this is where our world could be drifting to now, eerily unchanged. A new Age of Anxiety.

The movie *The Wizard of Oz* and particularly Dorothy's great song of yearning 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' are a distillation of where we believed ourselves to be in the 1930's, full of anxiety, but expressive of passionate hope and belief in a better world where ordinary people, like cowardly lions and tin men without a heart and scarecrows made of straw without a brain, will find courage, loving hearts, thoughtful minds, and all will find wonder and awe and beauty and truth.

As Dorothy and her companions journey along the yellow brick road, they are seeking the transcendent, an aspiration deep inside all of us. But whilst *The Wizard of Oz* resonates with our profoundest religious hopes, it remains formally a secular work of art. The actual Wizard is nothing but a big voice, and once he has been sussed out, nobody takes any more notice of him, let alone worship him. When Dorothy wakes up in her Kansas bedroom once more, the film ends with a seemingly banal philosophy:

"I'm not going to leave here ever, ever again, because I love you all! And - Oh, Auntie Em, there's no place like home!"

This seeming banality does not do justice to Dorothy's yearning for the something other, the something beyond. Certainly it does not do justice to our sense of the reality of something beyond, our knowledge within ourselves of the transcendent. To be true to our desire to seek the truth, to reach out and to embrace what is wonderful and awe inspiring and beautiful and true, we need to see more than the secular. This is not to deny the secular, but to place the secular, by which I mean those matters simply of this age and of this place, into their context.

That context is Christ's incarnation and resurrection and ascension, which give the world a new reality. Christ in his human and divine nature brings together the Creator and the created, God and his world. Heaven, God's realm, and earth, our space and time, meet in Christ. Heaven isn't part of our world of space, time and matter, but is a different dimension of reality, God's dimension. And God's dimension interacts with our own, most vividly in Christ. So when we hear Jesus' great prayer in this morning's Gospel reading asking God to protect us, his disciples, after he has ascended to the Father, we know that Christ has not gone on some long journey, some divine space travel, but that he is both with the Father and with us. Christ is intimately present to all of us, throughout time.

We can say with Dorothy, 'there's no place like home', but only if we widen the meaning of 'home' to include all that is mysterious and wonderful, all that is transcendent, as well as all that is intimate and loving and just; in truth, to widen the meaning of home to embrace all that is Christ. At that moment 'home' becomes a metaphor for sharing our life with Christ, and through Christ in prayer and in worship we enter into heaven, God's dimension. A dynamic relationship of love.

But we are not left in a simple one to one relationship with God. Christ commissions us to take all that is Him to the world at large. In 1939, when Judy Garland first sang 'Somewhere over the rainbow', the world in its brokenness and agony took all that is Christ and crucified him anew. If we allow the ascended Christ to enter our home and to transform us, in the name of the risen and ascended Christ, we can set an agenda to transform our world.

Our generation still has the opportunity, by the grace of God, to be witness to the love of God in Christ, not simply by proclaiming repentance and God's forgiveness of sins, but by bringing the love of God **for all** deep into our very being, for it is wonderful to know, and to tell, that in faith in God's love **we all** have the hope of eternal life.

So I ask this question. In this age of anxiety, as we strive to build a new order, where is our quest to find substance and identity, faith and truth, in a shifting and increasingly confused and agitated world - where is our quest leading us? Is our quest leading us to bring others in faith to God, and to bring justice to our society, or to some other, more self-regarding end?

I began with a 20th century song. I would like to end with a piece of 20th century poetry, by the American poet, Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*. For all his irony and sweet nostalgia, Frost helps us to recognise that radical and courageous choices in what we believe, in how we live our lives, and in whom we trust and follow, make the overwhelming and fundamental difference.

The poem ends:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Amen.

And now let us pray.