

KPC Remembrance Sunday sermon - Revd.Mat Ineson

Opening Prayer

Ever loving and faithful God, we ask that you would speak to us through your word, that we might walk more closely with you. Amen.

Who do you long to gather with? I mean if you could gather with anyone, who would you choose and where?

Perhaps, today, you'd like to gather in a church building to honour those who gave their lives in conflict and to pray for peace. Maybe you long to gather with loved ones separated from us by distance or lockdown. Perhaps you want to gather to watch your team play or gather in a pub for a drink and chat with your friends.

Who do you long to gather with?

All three readings today were about gathering. Micah's prophecy described people from many nations streaming to gather together before God at his Holy Mountain. They gathered to hear God arbitrate between nations, end war and conflict, and hear God's teaching about how to live in his ways.

The second reading from Revelation described people gathering with God at the end of time. They gather in the perfect new heaven and new earth formed after our current earth had passed away. God has made all things new.

In this amazing image there are no more tears, no more death and disease, no more grieving and war. Instead the gathered people receive eternal life from God in their very midst. They know love and peace. It's a beautiful image.

Our third reading is a story told by Jesus. It's a parable about wedding gathering. In Jesus day the groom came to the bride escorted by bridesmaids rather than the bride coming to the groom. But just like many a bride in our time the groom is late.

This groom is so late that the bridesmaids have fallen asleep waiting. When the groom eventually arrives only half the bridesmaids are ready. They escort the groom to the wedding gathering. The other 5 foolish unready bridesmaids miss the gathering. Sadly, they waited, they longed to gather, but they were not ready.

All three of these images, the mountain, the end of the age, the wedding, are describing the same promised event. Each is about people gathering with God at the end of time.

Christian faith is that at the end of time there will be a final judgement. Wars and violence, oppression and injustice, illness and death will all cease. And many will gather with God in a new and perfect heaven and earth.

I suspect many of us long for that to be so.

Today we gather online, to honour those who have given their lives for our freedom. We are very aware of the horrors and pain of war and conflict. At the beginning of this second lockdown we are each acutely aware of the pain of illness and the grief of loss.

What ever our faith position I suspect many of us are asking the same questions. There must be something better than this? Why is this happening? How long is this going to be like this? Where is God? When can we gather again?

What does Christian faith say to this?

The bible tells us that suffering will sadly be with us until the final judgement at the end of time. The bible also tells us the God is with us. We see that most clearly in Jesus. Jesus came as God with us. Immanuel. Because of Jesus we gather in the presence of God today.

Jesus suffered illness and got tired. He suffered grief at the death of loved ones. He suffered a violent death. And he was raised again from that death.

Jesus taught that those who follow him, would know him with them all the time. Jesus taught that those who follow him are guaranteed to be raised from the dead with him.

So death is not the end. This world is not all there is. We are promised so much more.

One day people will gather with God on that mountain, at that wedding, in that new heaven and new earth.

In the meantime, as we long for that gathering, we are taught, like the bridesmaids in Jesus 'story, to wait and be ready..

What does it mean to be ready?

Micah's answer to that question is "follow the teaching of God and walk in his paths."

And Jesus showed us that way, that path and invited us to follow him in it.

You see - we're made ready by following Jesus, learning from him and living like him. If we want to gather eternally with God, that is guaranteed through faith in Jesus Christ.

Check it out for yourself. Read one of the gospels. Mark is the shortest.

I look forward to gathering together with you as soon as we are able.

And with you, I long for the day when war and suffering will cease and we can gather with God and one another in the new heaven and the new earth. In the meantime, we wait, knowing Jesus is with us, and we remain ready by following Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,
our saviour, teacher, friend.

At this time of Remembrance meet us in our grief and thanksgiving, reveal yourself to each of us in our homes,

and strengthen us that we may always be ready for your return as we wait.

We long to gather with all of creation in the fullness of God.

Come Lord Jesus.

Amen