

Sunday Worship for 13 June 2021

The Second Sunday after Trinity

Remembering Grenfell

SERMON

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At this time of year, people in this community in North Kensington are very conscious of what happened here four years ago. No one living in this area will ever forget that day. It's affected their lives in more ways than we could ever imagine. My own memories of that day are still very vivid even now. I remember being in this building on the morning after the fire with people coming in evacuated from local homes, gifts coming from different parts of London and beyond, trying to pray with people, trying to give some support at a time of great need.

I remember it was a hot day. A frantic day. A day of confusion, of anxiety and fear, trying to bring a sense of comfort and hope, all the time trying to process how something like this fire could happen in a sophisticated, supposedly safe city like London in the 21st century. It's now four years since the fire. The public inquiries have slowly and painstakingly been piecing together all the tiny details that led up to that day and what went wrong.

And the story that's emerging is not a happy one. It's a story of careless decisions, of regulations ignored, of an industry that seemed at times more interested in making profits or selling products than keeping people safe. And of course, the whole process is taking longer than many of us would have hoped. And still across the country, thousands of people are living in flats with unsafe cladding or other safety defects, unable to sell their properties and yet facing the costs of waking watches, huge insurance bills, rising service charges, and so far no obvious answer as to who's going to pay for the mistakes that were made in the construction of their homes.

And many of you watching and listening today will have your own struggles and fears, situations that you are facing where you've longed and prayed for change. Maybe a sickness that you long for healing. A family relationship or a friendship that's broken. A dream that remains unfulfilled. Prayers that are yet unanswered. In his novel, "The Last Temptation," the great novelist Nikos Kazantzakis has this line, he says, "Deep in the foundations of wrong, God buries the small, despised cry of justice. Deep in the foundations of wrong, God buries the small, despised cry of justice."

In this world, where so much is painful and difficult and unjust, it's as if deep beneath the surface of all that is wicked and unfair, God plants the seed of justice, of goodness, of healing, a seed that will one day surely bear fruit. Our gospel reading today is about the story Jesus told about the kingdom of God being like a seed planted in the ground that grows slowly. First, it's buried deep under the surface, and then it germinates, and eventually little green shoots appear, and before long the stalk and the head and the grain; slowly but surely the harvest comes. The text tells us that the farmer sleeps and rises day and night and the seed sprouts and grows, he does not know how. We don't understand how this works, but it does.

Now, in this story, there are two things going on. The farmer doesn't just do nothing. He plants the seeds. He waters them. He makes sure they are protected from weeds. He applies fertiliser. And yet the actual process of growth is somehow out of his control. Now, it's like that when we wait for justice, for healing, for restoration. There are things that we need to do. We maybe need to cross the room to talk to those estranged from us, to make contact. We maybe need to campaign, to pray, to join with others, to ask for help.

There is an urgency about justice and healing. Martin Luther King gave a warning that justice too long delayed is justice denied. We need government to step up, to act, to relieve the struggles of those stuck in unsafe buildings around our country. There may be things that you and I can do today as well to resolve situations that just don't feel right at the moment.

And today, maybe after this service, you may want to think, what is it that you can do to bring goodness and justice to bear in those situations that just feel wrong? But at the same time, justice is never purely our achievement. Just as a seed grows because of the mysterious power of life at work within it. We also need the reassurance of God's promise that he will bring about justice, because he is the author of life, he is the bringer of righteousness. We cannot bear the weight of the need for justice alone. We cannot bring it about alone. The seed of justice needs to grow by the power of God, who placed the desire for it deep in our hearts, deep in the foundations of the world.

Now that longing for justice and for healing goes deep inside each of us. And yet justice always requires patience, prayer, and determination. It also requires trust. Our reading today from the Prophet Ezekiel has the image of God restoring his people and it uses the picture of planting a tree. Now, of course, trees take even longer to grow than grains of wheat. But at the end of that reading, we get this promise. I, the Lord, have spoken. I will accomplish it. Whatever you're facing today, in sending his son Jesus Christ, the God who made the world, the God who made you and me, the God who loves you and me gives us a promise. And that promise is that he is for us.

He is on our side. He is on the side of justice and restoration. We are not alone in our search to put things right. The pledge that he gives us is the gift of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we celebrate at this Pentecost season, the gift that enables us to experience and know the love and longings of God in our hearts. God has spoken. He will accomplish it. It may take time, it may need patience, but one day it will come. So, whether we are longing for justice for Grenfell, wanting to see change in the lives of communities around us. We do what we can today and tomorrow. We trust and we pray. And one day, in this life or the next, God's justice, God's healing will surely come.

Amen.