

Easter V (Rogation)

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[0:00] It was wonderful to be back with you at Holy Trinity.! Brenda and I are thrilled to be here.

! Would you open your Bibles with me at our Gospel reading in John chapter 16.! Christ has appeared to Mary in the garden, to the disciples behind the locked doors, to Thomas who would not believe unless he could touch the nail prints in Jesus' hand and put his hand into his side.

And yet our Gospel reading takes us back prior to Easter, to the night before Jesus is crucified, back to a table in Jerusalem, back to a room with frightened men who do not know how the story ends.

Why, in the Church's wisdom, do we get John 16 after Easter and not before Easter? Well, you've been studying these things, so you will already know the answer, because your rector will have told you why.

But just in case he didn't, the Church, in her wisdom, knows something that the disciples then did not know.

[1:30] She places John 16 here in what we call Eastertide, in the season of Easter, precisely because these words can only be fully understood from the other side of the resurrection, with the empty tomb in our sights.

And the disciples that night, remember, they heard Jesus speak of grief. They heard him speak of departure, and they were bewildered. We hear those same words, knowing that everything he actually said in John 16 came to pass.

And we read them not in the dark, but we read them standing in the light of Easter morning, looking back, and that changes everything.

Yes? We're allowed to say amen, even as Anglicans, you know. When Jesus said, and you would have caught it as I read to us this morning in John 16, when Jesus said, I have overcome the world, that statement on the night the disciples first heard it sounded like a claim.

This morning we know it is a fact. The tomb is empty. Easter is God's, the Father's public witness that Jesus told the truth, and that the Word of God can be trusted.

[2:52] The empty tomb in itself shows us that Jesus has overcome the world. And so this morning, on this side of the resurrection, we're going to look back to the upper room.

So journey with me in your minds. That's why you'll find it helpful, I believe, to have the text there open and glance down, if you would, at John 16 with me.

It's the night of the Passover. Within hours, Jesus will be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. By morning, He will be on trial.

By midday, He will be on the cross. And He knows all of this. But the disciples do not. And so He does something extraordinary in what we call the farewell discourse, or Jesus' final words to the disciples.

They begin in John 13, and they end here in our passage today. And in this farewell discourse, He gathers His closest friends around Him for a Passover meal.

[4:01] The disciples with whom He had lived and walked for three years. And He speaks to them plainly and personally and pastorally. Earlier in the same chapter, He pressed on them the advantage of His Word.

The advantage of His departure, sending the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to them. And then He comes to these closing verses of chapter 16. And He gathers all those promises together into a single decisive declaration.

And He ends on a great theme. Tribulation and triumph. And He's preparing the disciples. And He's preparing us.

Looking back at these words of Jesus from our vantage point of resurrection people, we can see how He was preparing us. To the disciples, they sounded like challenging words. And I want you to notice three things today. From these few verses at the very end of John chapter 16. Firstly, confidence in Christ.

[5:06] Remember confidence and remember Christ. Secondly, conflict in the world. Remember conflict and remember world. And then thirdly, comfort in Christ.

Remember comfort and remember Christ. So stay with me as we journey these things through. Glance down at verses 28 through 31. Just have a look in the text with me. Confidence in Christ. Listen to the words of Jesus. I came from the Father and have come into the world. And now I am leaving the world. And I'm going to the Father. This is important information here. Jesus is speaking and directing the minds of the disciples to objective truth. To factual information about Himself. Although this is His farewell. He doesn't begin with His departure. He begins with His entrance. Do you notice this? In order to help them understand His exit.

[6:11] His origin. His destiny. Are all exactly the same. He came from the Father. He traces a full circumference. And He's going back to the Father.

His descent is what gives weight to His ascent. His humiliation is what gives weight to His exaltation.

Do you see those themes coming together in this verse? Four sweeping movements in one single verse. And they're nothing less than the whole gospel in miniature.

Let me explain it to you. Firstly, Jesus comes from the Father. Think of this. His origin. And He takes us back in our minds to where. John chapter 1.

The very beginning of this same gospel. In the beginning was the Word. In the beginning was Jesus. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

[7:06] And the Word was God. We hear that at Christmas time, don't we? In our Christmas evening service. Jesus comes from the Father. Secondly, Jesus comes into the world.

We call that His incarnation. The second person of the Trinity. The infinite and eternal God has assumed a human nature. Incredible.

And we mustn't sanitize what this means. He did not merely appear as a man. He did not merely wear humanity like a garment to be slipped on and off when we're at work.

He took on humanity. He took it upon Himself. Blood, bone, breath. He took it on forever. His incarnation.

What does that mean? It means that the one by whom all things were made was knit together in the womb of a young woman in Nazareth.

[8:06] The hands that once at the beginning flung the stars into space were the hands of a newborn curling around his Jewish mother's finger.

He was hungry, thirsty, tired. He wept at the grave of a friend. He sweat, as it were, drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane. His back was laid open by the lash.

His brow was torn by thorns. Iron was driven through his wrists. And in his feet he bled. He grasped for breath. He died. This isn't poetry.

This is the gospel. This is His incarnation. The Son of God would take on a body that would bleed. And this is the wonder of our faith.

It's the infinite stooping low. The eternal entering our time. The immortal taking on mortal flesh.

[9:07] The mortal flesh that might be clothed with immortality. And as the homily, the great homily of the Anglican Church on the Nazivity puts it, He came down from heaven that we might be made children of God.

He took what was ours that He might give us what is His. His incarnation. So what are we learning? Jesus comes from the Father.

Jesus came into the world. His incarnation. But now He says, I'm leaving the world. And it points us to His death and resurrection and ascension.

He's not merely departing. He's actually departing in triumph. The work for which He has come has been accomplished. He announces that on the cross.

It is finished. Tetelestai is the word. The price has been paid. The grave has been emptied. The veil has been torn. He's leaving the world not as one driven out of the world.

[10:11] He's leaving as the great victor and the conqueror. The risen king who is trampled down death by death. And fourthly, where is He going? He's going to the Father.

Do you see the great circumference here? He comes from the Father. He comes into the world. He sends back to the Father and He goes to Him. This is His exaltation.

He returns to the right hand of the Father. He returns to the right hand of the Father, bearing out our humanity. And there He reigns as the great king, interceding as our great high priest, speaking as the great prophet, the final word from heaven.

And there the circle is complete. Coming from the Father, going to the Father, and carrying we His people with Him in His own glorified body.

Bishop J.C. Ryle, one of my great Anglican heroes, in his expository thoughts on John's gospel, notes the staggering compressor of the gospel into this single verse in John chapter 16.

[11:17] Here in a sentence, he says, a child could memorize the gospel. It's the whole compass of redemption. Incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension.

That's what it's all about. And here's the Lord Jesus. And remember, we're looking at this from this side of John 16. The disciples are over here before Jesus goes to the cross.

We're looking back from the resurrection. And from this side of John 16, we can trace all this incredible history. From the throne to the manger.

From the manger to the cross. From the cross to the tomb. From the tomb, back to the throne. And He does this not to satisfy our curiosity.

But He does this to secure our confidence. Our confidence is in Christ alone. Are you with me? Say yes, Bishop.

[12:19] Yes, Bishop. Stay with me now. Because I want you to consider the response of the disciples. I'm wondering what your response is. We're told what their response is.

Let's go back to the text in John 16. And in verse 30, Jesus says all of this to them. And what do they say? Now we know. We believe.

Now we understand. And here's the beautiful picture of what ought to be the experience of every Christian. When God speaks in the preaching of His Word, Our confidence ought to be grounded and deepened and broadened and heightened under the Word of God.

We come weak. We leave strengthened. We come anxious. We hear the beautiful psalm that you read to us this morning. We come anxious. We hear the Word of God.

It settles our spirits. We come doubting. And we leave like the disciples saying, Now we believe. Now we know. Now we believe.

[13:23] Some of you will have heard of Hudson Taylor. He had this incredible confidence of belief in the Word of God. About 1853. At the age of 21, He boarded the Dumfries in Liverpool and set sail for China, a voyage that took him back then, round the Cape of Good Hope, nearly six months.

And he went almost alone, with no money, guarantee of welcome, into a country that had only recently and reluctantly opened her doors to the Gospel, and in a very limited way at that.

And he carried it in his trunk, beyond a few worldly necessities, the Word of God. And what he carried in his heart was the conviction that the Word of God in this book was true.

We speak of it in Anglican terms being inerrant. And he took that Word of God, and he carried that conviction in his heart, and over the next half a century, the China Inland Mission, which he founded, would send more than 800 missionaries into the interior of China, planting hundreds of stations, they called them, and seen tens of thousands of people confess faith in Christ.

And Hudson Taylor, read about him sometime, was asked what sustained him, through famine, through bereavement, through the loss of his beloved wife, Maria, through the boxer rebellion, in which scores of his missionaries and their children were martyred.

[14:53] It's a chilling reading. He answered the three great truths upon which his entire life had rested. He said, there are three great truths. First, that there is a God.

Second, that he has spoken to us in his Word. And third, he means what he says. That's faith, isn't it?

That's how we, like the disciples, can say, now we know. And now, we believe. Amen? Amen. It's a great testimony of the church down throughout the ages in our hymns.

You might be able to sing it with me, some of you. Standing on the promises of God, I cannot fail when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail by the living Word of God, I shall prevail standing on the promises of God.

Brenda, your parents loved that hymn. They sang it often in their church. That's the soil in which Hudson's Taylor stood in China. And it's the soil in which believers stared at Holy Trinity.
[16:03] Syracuse this morning, the same God. Yes? The same Bible. Yes? The same promises. Yes? The same Savior.

Yes? Who means what he says. Confidence in Christ. Quickly, I've got a couple more. Stay with me. Verse 32. Conflict in the world.

Now, this is a little chilling. But Jesus said it, and I must share it with you. Look with me in verse 32. Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.

Yet I am not alone. The Father is with me. Now, Jesus has been a realist here. The Bible refuses to deceive us.

He says, in effect, you have faith, over which I rejoice, but understand this, look at those later verses, you will have tribulation.

[17:14] You will have conflict in the world. It's a fascinating word, that word tribulation. I was looking at it earlier with Brenda this morning.

In the original Greek, if you study it, it's the word flitless. It means to, to, um, to press, to squeeze, to crush.

That's not something we want to hear, really, is it? Think of grapes being trodden for wine, or, or olives being crushed in the press for oil.

You will, you will have this, this pressing, Jesus says, this, this conflict, and he forewarns us, the word carries this agricultural violence with it.

Outward conflict from the enemies of the gospel, and inward pressure to stand firm in the faith. You have faith, but understand, said Jesus, you will have conflict in the world.

[18:21] And the conflict wasn't reserved for Jesus' generation. We're seeing it in ours too, aren't we? It's a lived reality for the church of Jesus Christ in our own day.

Even today, more than 360 million Christians in the world today live in places of high pressure and discrimination for the faith.

That's what, roughly one in every seven Christians. Some pastor somewhere has been detained today for preaching the gospel.

Somewhere today, a convert from Islam has been beaten by her own family. Somewhere today, a congregation is gathering in the forest because they have no church building in which to safely meet.

Think of our brothers and sisters in northern Nigeria where village after village has been emptied by jihadist violence. Churches burned, pastors slaughtered at the altar, women and girls carried off.

[19:25] Think of the Christians in the Sudan or in Eritrea where Dean and Korea from this congregation have been ministering. Think of those in North Korea, in Pakistan, in Iran.

Think of the dwindling Christian congregations in the Middle East. The cradle of our faith where the gospel was first preached and where today the brethren cling to the cross under the shadow of the sword.

Think of those in our own beloved global Anglican communion who pay the price simply for confessing what we sing in the creed Sunday by Sunday.

Look, verse 32, Jesus furnishes his disciples with lessons to be learned that night. We're seeing this being played out from the other side of the tomb.

They will be scattered and they were and so will we. He's drawing on Zechariah 13, Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

[20:27] He cites that verse on this same evening in Matthew chapter 26 and a few hours later in the garden of Gethsemane the prophecy is fulfilled. All the disciples we're told are scattered.

They left him. Why? Each to his own home. Each looking after himself. Jesus forewarns us and he's preparing them. He's preparing them.

And so the church of Jesus Christ has prayed in every age and we pray this morning at Holy Trinity in the words of our book of common prayer. O Lord we beseech thee let thy continual mercy cleanse and defend thy church and because she cannot continue in safety without thee without thy sucker preserve her evermore by thy help and goodness.

We need the Lord's grace in this hour. That's the prayer of the persecuted in Pakistan. That's the prayer of the persecuted in the plateau state in Nigeria and it's the prayer of every trembling

believer in every pew this morning.

Preserve the church Lord evermore by thy help and goodness. He will do it for he has promised to do so. So what are we learning this morning? Confidence in Christ.

[21 : 48] The great gospel circumference has come and in Christ has returned to the Father. We're learning that there will be tribulation conflict in the world and we're learning finally even in the midst of that conflict look quickly verse 33 there will be comfort in Christ alone.

I listened for it as if I read it this morning from the gospel. Look verse 33 the closing verse of this entire farewell discourse from chapter 13 to chapter 16.

I have said these things to you said Jesus why? That you might have peace. In the world he says you will have tribulation but take heart.

Remember where we're looking at this from from this side of the tomb we know the tomb is empty the disciples over here didn't know that. We know it. In the world he says you will have tribulation I have overcome the world.

Peace is the purpose of this entire discourse. The Lord Jesus has been laying it before the disciples from the beginning of the evening and here in this verse he gathers it all into his hand and he gives it to them.

[23 : 12] And notice the precise words where is the peace to be found? in him in Christ. Paul picks this theme up later. He is not merely the source of peace though he is.

He is not merely the purchaser of peace though he is that too. He is the embodiment of peace. It is in fellowship with him in nearness to him that true peace can be found.

Now listen many of us including your bishop from time to time suffer from anxiety. Listen to this wonderful quote from one of the incredible men of faith in the church.

The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. Think about that. He goes on the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.

Why? Because he will do it. Because we can trust in him. Because he is able far more abundantly to do anything we can ask or imagine.

[24 : 31] Because from over here we can look at John 16 and the tomb is empty. I have overcome the world said Jesus. Yes in the world you will have tribulation.

But I have overcome the world. He proclaims victory in the midst of tribulation. And later Paul would be able to say where oh death is thy victory?

Where oh death is thy sting? Listen to Archbishop Cramner. The architect of the prayer book in the great Easter collect capturing the same triumph.

He wrote Almighty God who through thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ has overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life so by his continual help we may bring the same to good effect through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is comfort in Christ. Peace in him. He has overcome the world. He's opened the gate of everlasting life.

[25 : 44] The book of homilies declares the same Easter triumph that Christ is and I quote the most mighty conqueror over hell sin and death.

What more do we need? The verb in the Greek is decisive. He has overcome.

It is finished. He has done it. And so our Lord brings this farewell discourse to a close. And he ends precisely where he began tying his people to himself.

Have confidence in me he says. You will have conflict in the world. In me you will have peace. In me you will have triumph.

How we need him I think we're going to sing that this morning. Didn't I hear you practicing that earlier? That we need him how we need the Lord.

[26 : 44] He will never never leave us and never never forsake us. That's the promise of Christ. Confidence in him. Yes we will have conflict in the world.

But he will bring us his peace for he has overcome. Let us pray. O God from whom all holy desires and all good counsels and just works do proceed.

Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments and that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.