

I live under the illusion that John's Gospel is my favourite – then I read it and I find myself thinking “what?” It's certainly not an easy read this week.

On Ascension Day we heard the story from the Acts of the Apostles, of the moment when Jesus stopped being physically present with his disciples.

They had been with him for three years witnessing how he lived. They were convinced he was someone special and then, rather than seize the power they had been sure was his for the taking, Jesus submitted to the power of the religious authorities and allowed himself to be killed.

The disciples fell apart and it took some time for them to believe various eyewitnesses who said that their dead friend had risen from the dead. But gradually they realised they were being given another opportunity to witness how Jesus lived. Their hopes for him were ignited once more and at the beginning of the Ascension Day reading on Thursday (Acts 1:4-11) we heard them ask: “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ...oh dear... if you ever catch yourself lamenting that you just don't change – same sins, same failings, remember Jesus didn't give up on his disciples, he won't give up on you!

In today's reading from John's Gospel we listen in to one of Jesus' prayers. I wonder what the disciples made of Jesus' request that God would glorify him as he had glorified God. Did this raise their hopes that Jesus was going to act at last in defence of their beleaguered country and gain the glory they so patently desired for him and perhaps themselves?

Irenaeus, saint from the 2nd century, described the glory of God as being “man fully alive.” Jesus, as he speaks of glorification is speaking of the fullness of life that he demonstrated as he lived on earth. A fullness of life that somehow he was able to reveal even as he died on the cross. A glory, or fullness of life that he had known with God before the world was made and that he longed to return to even though the gateway to this glory was through the appalling portal of his death on a cross.

Eternal life is knowing God, and having the life of God within us – this same fullness of life that Jesus had.

10 days after the ascension of Jesus the disciples were suddenly filled with this life. The Holy Spirit of Jesus came and turned their lives upside down or perhaps it turned their lives the right way up! Whichever it was - they suddenly became fully alive.

Life did not become easier for them. As the way of Jesus failed to die down with the death of Jesus, and as rumours of Jesus' continuing life grew, so the authorities became more desperate and attacked these empowered followers. Followers who seemed invincible as they did not seem to even fear death anymore.

Filled with the Holy Spirit they too were glorified as they became fully alive. Some, like Jesus, showed this life in all its fullness even as they were killed. Some lived to spread the good news about Jesus and the life he offers all who want it.

How alive do you feel in this scary world that we are living in? Do you want the life in all its fullness that Jesus offers us? Fullness of life that is available in the midst of whatever you currently face not just some future dream for when everything is ok? It is costly – Jesus described it as laying down one's life, letting go of the illusory control we think we have over our lives. But if we dare let go of the life we wanted to shape for ourselves, and hand ourselves over into God's eternally loving hands, we will find ourselves living more deeply, more thoroughly than we ever thought possible.

Easter 7 – 24th May 2020 Revd Noelle Taylor

It is 7 days until we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, as the church prays “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the fire of your love.” shall we dare pray:

“Come Holy Spirit fill my heart and my life and kindle in me the fire of your love”...?