

Words for the Future!

Sunday 17th May 2026 - 10:00am Holy Communion

Acts 1:6-14

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

<Prayer>

I wonder what could be the last piece of advice that you would give to someone? If you had only one thing to say, and only one more opportunity to say it, what would it be? Was there something you always wanted to say, but couldn't?

History records many famous last words. These are some slightly funny ones that I found:

Spike Milligan – 'I told you I was l'll' (apparently, it's on his gravestone)

George Orwell – 'Everyone gets the face they deserve.'

Bob Hope, the dying American comedian on being asked by his wife where he wanted to be laid to rest, said – I don't know, surprise me.

Governments, churches and people often have to speak into the future in way that makes it sound as if they confidently know how it's all going to turn out, but at the same time carrying all the uncertainties of not knowing for sure. Haven't we just had another round of politicians vying for support or survival by speaking with a confidence and certainty that they cannot possibly control? Prediction is a business that some people have get into, to try to confidently address present uncertainties with a rosier future.

Now I wonder, is the Christian faith just like any other sort of insurance? Some have claimed it to be no more than that. Are we selling the future or at least trying to set it. **Well, it would certainly be true to say that contained within our faith, and within the scriptures, is a big place for the future.** Christian hope, as you will have heard me say many times before, is a potent spiritual reality that for many is the reason they call themselves Christians at all. Our faith gives us something to understand life, and where it may lead – we have not been left without some confidence in facing our mortal future.

As God's faithful people, we have a belief that faces-down the uncertainties of life with something of real peace and comfort.

I hope you feel that carrying something of the reassuring promises of God is far more reliable than to just treat the future as a place of chance and fate, where you have to place your bets. Well, that is a big thing I've just said there, so let us unpack that a little more.

A common attack upon the Christian faith is to challenge it with the language of certainty. How can you know it is real, they ask? How can you prove the existence of God? How can you know that prayer is as powerful as you say it is? Perhaps I could go on with such questions to place a test over the resurrection, the virgin birth, or the existence of evil. But if we imagine these questions as a sort of unanswerable emptiness, no more than an ontological lack of certainty and knowledge, **then we shall quickly find that no one else has any more definite answers either.** A good rhetorical counter-question to those who test the claims of the Christian faith is to ask – **well do you have a better future then?**

I can know that this pulpit is made of wood, or that the lights will come on when I flick the switch, but that is not the sort of certainty which accompanies us into the future. No one can look ahead in such easy terms of knowledge – **we you can never know what time may bring.** So, we look for other words to describe it. When the Christian faith speaks of hope, heaven, prayer and prophecy, then we are using our Christian experience of the past to take us into the future. All of these are chariots which have endured as believable and reliable when look to ride into the unknown. **Our Christian approach to the coming years has a long tail of past memory to give us confidence ahead. Our future in Christ began a long time ago.**

Our same beliefs help us to replace other devices of prediction which have no experience or memory at all – chance, luck, accident and gamble. When things turn out however they do, for good or bad, we may find ourselves speaking of fate and destiny and fortune. But none of these empty vessels has any place in the Christian life. There is no doctrine or theology of luck or fate. **For us, all things are in God's hands.**

Those with Jesus have seen and heard many things they do not understand. In Jesus's final moments with them, it is as if they put to him the really big question they always wanted to ask. They may have been kicking this particular can down the road for years: '**Is this the time**', they ask him, is this the big reveal when the actual 'big thing' is going to happen? They want to see and for everyone to understand and realise in the complete certainty for action. For them it was a call for the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel – a victory – a completion – justice and sovereignty of a certain future, free from imperial paganism and all the good things put back in. When they ask? When? **But it's not going to be like that.**

Jesus says, '**It is not for you to know**'. How must they have felt to hear Him say that?

But in our faith, those words of Jesus are a lot less of a problem than they might seem to be. I actually quite like not knowing things! I've got a whole long list of things I don't know!

How often have we approached our prayers as a pleading for our chosen outcome, for the result we need? *Dear God, please make it this way.* In faith we pour out our souls in hope for the best. I do that each and every day, as I'm sure you do. But I don't always get an answer.

When we pray into the unknown, in faith, we somehow offer to God our openness for him to show his love - to direct us into a way he sees is best for us. Jesus might say, *'It is not for you to know'*, but we can be sure that God does – and there is an act of faith. So, I'm fine with that. Nothing falls outside of God – he knows, I don't.

A large part of what amounts to worry and stress for me (and I do worry and stress quite well), is addressed by the surety that my life and future are in God's hands. I sometimes pray for God to grant me a gift, *'Lord, teach me to be able to say with all sincerity that sometimes I just don't have to worry.'* It's quite a comforting through really – so you come to me *'Oh rector, what about his, what about that.....oh I don't know!'*

Part of the lesson the disciples were being taught that Ascension Day, was that by no longer being there, Christ was not gone, the future was not unknown, and our faith is given new space for it's good work in us. Jesus himself promised that his Holy Spirit will fill them, and two angels were there to confirm it – just like other times of uncertainty in the gospels like the annunciation to Mary, and the resurrection.

Not knowing how things will turn out for you is not a lack of God's protection over your life. **And a lack of certainty is not the absence of God – it is an opportunity for faith.**

Amen