

Sermon preached by the Bishop of Birmingham, the Rt Revd David Urquhart on Maundy Thursday, April 5th 2007 at St Philips Cathedral.

Texts: Isaiah 61:1-9, James 5:13-16a, Luke 4:16-21

There is some debate in the academy as to when the church began:

before Abraham was I AM

outside the empty tomb

on the beach at Peter's re-commissioning

after the Ascension

the Day of Pentecost

or at any one of the hundreds of inaugurations of new denominations from the 1st century to the 21st century, not least our own: 1534; 1549; 1662; 1996.....

For me it began when Jesus started revealing himself to the first disciples and equipping them as learners and servant leaders.

The Nazareth Manifesto – a Judaeo- Christian there for all time faced them and us with the broken world Jesus came to heal. As this year progresses, we will be thinking hard about what sort of church we are and what are part is in God's mission. Putting the word (message) into action (practise) was costly brokenness for Jesus and his disciples as it is for us.

Meanwhile, we gather today renewing our ordination promises, recognising in the oils our commitment to initiation, healing, service...

I acknowledge with gratitude the hundreds of self-giving ministers ordained or lay throughout this Diocese working together in our exhilarating, exacting and sometimes tedious tasks. What do these four days from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday mean for the rhythm of our ministry as we allow our lives to be shaped and refreshed by Jesus?

Thursday.... being served by Christ (He showed them the full extent of of his love) noting: the characteristic impetuosity of Peter; and the signs of servant-leadership - towel, water, foot-washing.

In my recent travels around the Diocese I have found dozens of remarkable acts of service, captives released and the broken-hearted healed. We who serve must also be ministered unto and I am grateful for those surprising moments of care from family, friends and parishioners who become Christ's love to us.

Friday.....being forgiven by Christ.

The day of his suffering and death on a cross, facing the worst of human evil, false accusation, rejection, and torture. He was not just identifying with the pain of the world but bearing our sins.

There is no cheap grace as we pronounce forgiveness in His name. We are to be the first to kneel at the foot of the cross.

I pray that we will have the freedom to ‘confess our sins to one another and be healed.’ This requires not only a sense of God’s righteousness and judgement but also a profound sense of trust. I hope this will go on growing amongst us and that we will know the freedom of forgiveness.

Saturdayfacing the absence of God.

Alan Lewis’ *Between Cross and Resurrection* is an annual challenge to me (who would always see a cup half full rather than half empty) to face the horror of the world.

For us who minister there will be bleak times and blank times... This is when we seek strength to go beyond the faith of atheism and humanism but without hiding in end-times platitudes.

To face the world as it really is we need to make sure we retreat and receive our nurture of spiritual direction so that our hope is being renewed.

Sunday..... having resurrection power.

Holy Saturday did not last forever. The early Sunday morning surprise and shock turned rapidly to joy and new life.

Meditating on the supernatural power that raised Jesus from the dead: ‘The first fruit of those who sleep’ let us be reignited by Paul’s conviction: ‘If Christ is not raised from the dead our preaching is useless and so is our faith’ (1 Corinthians 15:14) and expect Him to do remarkable things.

Let the fullness of the Holy Spirit draw us closer to the Risen Christ so that as his forgiven servants in a hostile world we may together participate in this mission in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world by which I take our Lord to include Birmingham, Solihull, Sandwell, Warwickshire... in this small part of his beloved Church.