

Easter 2023, Year A, Indwelling, John 14.1-14

A few weeks ago we considered how to indwell (meaning to live in) the season of Easter intentionally, so that it might become a line of music in our lives. Yesterday hundreds of millions witnessed how King Charles III was called to indwell the office of sovereign as the King of the United Kingdom and other realms. The service's emphasis was on him being a Servant King after the example of Jesus, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. The coronation was a Christian service with acknowledgements and touches of generosity towards peoples of other religions in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and historically multi-lingual country.

Today's gospel reading recalls Jesus' pronouncement on how he Jesus, the Son, indwells the Father and how the Father indwells the Son. Is this mutual indwelling, abiding in, something you have given much thought to? Is this mutual indwelling and abiding something that stirs you, something that evokes your wonder? If not, maybe it should? In the words of St Paul, Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. Jesus' pronouncement captures an aspect of the Christian life that does and must give shape to every Christian life concerning what we believe and who we are becoming. Heady stuff indeed!

Today we were going to conclude our stewardship campaign with the blessings of the response pledges of time, talent and treasure. The treasurer asked for the blessing of the pledges to be postponed by one week. Responses there have been a few. Each response is at least this – an indication of how we intend to indwell our Christian calling in the local Christian community, which should never be an also-ran. Each response is an indication of how connected we are. Each response is an indication of how we seek to live out our Christian calling. We must pray and can hope that over the coming weeks more people will respond cheerfully and generously.

A stewardship campaign is always a call that touches on our very own existence in an immediate and personal way, as it involves electing freely after prayerful consideration to live and order our lives in a specific way namely towards God and not towards ourselves. It is a call to live an ordered and constructive discipleship for the good of the Church today that is Christ's and the local expression of the same. It is a way of indwelling our faith, which is to live our life as Christians intentionally.

Another way of trying to make sense of the indwelling of the Father and the Son of which Jesus speaks of is to use verbs like to put on and to be clothed in. It may be helpful to consider how King Charles was cloaked in the royal robes after being stripped of them. He is to put on the robes of a servant king after the example of Jesus Christ, Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The author to the Ephesians uses an image taken from the Roman world of his time, which he indwells. He writes, 'Put on the whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6:10). What does the whole armour of God encompass. According to the author of the letter the armour is 1. truth, 2. righteousness, 3. proclamation of peace, 4. shield of faith, 5. salvation, and 6. the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Now there are different ways of indwelling the Christian faith. Very briefly I want to mention them, because becoming aware of them may be helpful to you and to us. We have a culture-based Christianity whose tide has been ebbing for ever so long. We have an issue-based Christianity, where Christianity is used as a means to an end. And we have the one we are concerned with here at Christ Church a faith-based Christianity.

I remember well how as the Bishop's Chaplain to Students at the University of Bradford and Ilkley Community College I was called upon to preach on a passage like the one we are considering about the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. 'Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me' and thinking just how strange these

texts were and are. And this remembering always takes me back to the church where I first preached on indwelling/abiding. The church was St John the Evangelist, Bierley, in Bradford, West Yorkshire in the year 1990 or so. If my thoughts remain as incoherent as then, we can see how difficult it is for us to wrap our minds around them.

Often when I think of how to think of faith I think of a vessel or a container like this carafe. A vessel has a shape. It has a form. It serves a purpose. The Christian faith has a shape. Just as this service has a shape. Both faith and service shape us often imperceptibly inch by inch, step by step. I will now quickly pour water and wine into this carafe. As we can see the water and wine that now indwell the container have become one. Just as the Father and the Son are one and indwell each other. They are in relation to one another as is the water and wine contained in this vessel.

There is an image I offer you to think about how the Father and the Son indwell each other. An indwelling we are offered to participate in through the Son, Jesus and I do so mindful of words from Christina Rossetti's poem 'In the bleak midwinter',

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Jesus takes a shape the form of a servant, summed up here in the words of the poet in the words of the poet 'a stable place sufficed' and what seemingly cannot be, actually is. The person indwelling the stable is shockingly at one and the same time the Lord God Almighty. It is an extraordinary claim and when put as starkly as this we can understand why people rebel. Issue-based Christianity and culture-based Christianity can find these offensive, while faith-based Christianity will find them challenging. It is not comfortable being a Christian, which Gabe made clear in his sermon last week, referencing, Comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable.

The body of Christ has a shape. It has a form. It has contours. Which is to say it is something in itself. It is not arbitrary. The contours are defined through God being present in creation through the Holy Spirit and in Jesus Christ. We learn about the shape and the contours of our faith, the shape of the body of the Christ, by being soaked in Scripture, by attending to prayer, by taking seriously one's own sin firstly, as well as the teaching of the Church. The constant reading of Scripture in time gives new shape to who we are, as prayer and participation in the Eucharist do as well. This is unavoidable. We may come kicking and screaming, but in truth we should welcome our becoming.

Thinking of our stewardship campaign as eliciting a free response of gratitude and joy, which we might aptly call *A Way of Living*, will also give shape to how we are ready to allow ourselves to be shaped, be changed, by God's grace working within us, by the leading of the Holy Spirit and by the example of Jesus, the anointed one, and the word of Scripture.

Let me end by returning to the visual aid a carafe holding water and wine through which wine and water indwell each other and indeed permeate each other. What does this carafe accomplish? It allows for mutual indwelling, but it also holds the water and the wine poured into it. Those who indwell Christ are also being held in the hands of God, which is the love of God and being held, by participating in the life of God in and through Jesus Christ. I end by fast forwarding to the next chapter of John's gospel,

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.