

11th June 2020

Message from the Rt Rev Philip North, Bishop of Burnley



Welcome to my Chapel, a space designed, like most of our church buildings, for a meal.

This week many churches would have been keeping a Feast in which we give thanks for the gift of the Eucharist. Some call it the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion. Others Corpus Christi.

Whatever you call it, it's a day to rejoice that, Jesus makes himself know to us in a powerful and unique way as we attend to the scriptures and feed on bread and wine. Heaven is thrown open. Our hearts burn within us.

We are sent into the world for service. But this year, it's going to be hard. For nearly three months we have had to keep a Eucharistic fast which, whilst necessary, is incredibly tough. We might welcome the opening of some of our churches this week, but still we will miss with all hearts gathering together within them to feast with the Lord on his body and blood. So what do we do until we can meet for the Eucharist again? Two things. We can long. We can live.

First of all, we can long for the Eucharist. When you have to do without something for a period of time, you usually realise afresh just how precious it is. Even with the Eucharist it can be easy to grow complacent, to take its mystery for granted. This time in which we long for the Eucharist is a chance to realise anew the incredible privilege we have of sharing in the banquet of heaven. To long for the Eucharist is to long for Jesus. So just think what joy will fill your heart when we can meet again and share in the Lord's gifts.

But second, we can live the Eucharist. In St John's Gospel there is no narrative of the institution of the Eucharist. It's as if he realised that the other evangelists had picked up that one and so he goes a step further. Instead of telling us how to celebrate the Eucharist, he shows us how to live it. And he does that by telling how Jesus washed the disciples the feet in an act of loving service.

The Eucharist is not just something we attend. It is a lifestyle. As in bread and wine Jesus gives us the memorial of his self-giving love on the cross, so those who share in the Eucharist are called to give their lives away in service. Whilst we may not be able to come together at the moment to celebrate the Eucharist, we can still live the Eucharist as we give our lives away.

And how much do we need that right now. Around the world people are crying out for justice in the wake of George Floyd's murder, they are longing for compassion as they live with poverty and the loss of jobs, they are seeking healing as they live with sickness and grief. This is our chance to live Eucharistic lives as we serve, as we love, as we forgive, as we speak out, as we build the Kingdom that the Eucharist anticipates.

We may not yet be able to celebrate the Eucharist. But we can long for it. And we can live it.