

## Easter 6

John 14:15-21 21 May 2017

Earlier this week I had to go through the Rotherhithe Tunnel. It was pouring with rain and I was on my Vespa. I was taking a totally unfamiliar route – indeed I don't think I have ever been through the Rotherhithe tunnel before. Let me tell you about it.

It has huge gates on the approach to it, like the gates you may imagine at the entrance to hell. There are height restrictors to prevent lorries getting stuck in it. And during the approach there are a series of signs that can be deployed in order to turn you back if the tunnel needs to be closed.

It has a big sign above the tunnel celebrating it's opening in 1908 by George, Prince of Wales, who we may imagine then gaily trotted through it in his carriage, but not in his Range Rover Evoque. There are pavements on each side of the tunnel although I could not imagine walking through it in any but the most dire of circumstances.

There is space for 2 lanes of traffic inside the tunnel. Again its slimness and twisting snaking route may have suited its designer's generation but it is an odd tunnel to go through now packed as it is with cars and vans of all sizes making their way through the gloom and strangeness of being under the Thames.

The tunnel was packed, but traffic kept moving. The road was slippery and dangerous. The light was dim and the air was unspeakable. It was so filled with fumes that there was a haze making it harder to see. And I was aware of trying not to breath as every breath felt like a gulp of something toxic.

But all of this was made to feel more terrifying, more unpredictable and more unhealthy by a prominent sign that I had seen on the approach to the tunnel. It said:

“Cyclists and motorcyclist Take care!”

I could not have read a more discouraging sign. I was on a motorcycle. I knew I was vulnerable to all the perils of the weather, the air quality, the slippery road and the huge cars all around me and the powers that be offered me the

words “Take Care.” It felt about as comforting as “You’re on your own from here.”

I was reminded of the phrase from the Hunger Games. In those stories young people are chosen at random to be involved in lethal fights in order to entertain the masses. As these poor young people are about to enter the battle arena and are highly likely to die, the powerful ruler says, “May the odds be ever in your favour.” It is of no meaning and no help to them as they enter the fray alone unprepared and terrified.

“Motorcyclists take care.” It may as well have said, “It is horrible in there. Good luck!”

By putting up that sign, the traffic authorities were trying to be helpful I suppose. It is dangerous out there so they were appealing to my best efforts to be careful. It was, to be fair all they could offer. But its effect was at best useless and at worse to cause me to be more tense and therefore less likely to ride at my careful best.

I only saw one other motorcyclist in the tunnel and he was coming the other way – on the pavement. I thought that

maybe “Take care” to him meant, “Do whatever it takes to get through there – courage!”

I think this experience was so striking to me because I had been mulling over this passage from John 14:15-21.

Here Jesus promises to send part of himself, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit to live with us and in us.

The Holy Spirit is like an advocate, standing on our side in tough times.

The HS is like a helper, or comforter simply there when we need encouraging.

The HS is a guide helping us make decisions and to turn the right ways.

The HS is like Google maps. On my Vespa journeys I have my head phones in, not to listen to music but to listen to directions from Google maps. A calm warm voice tells me clearly “In 300 meters, turn right into Acme Road.” Then as we approach the junction, me and Google that is, the voice says “Turn right into Acme Road.” If I miss the

turning, GMs just finds a new route, never shouting or getting cross. She also tells me if there is traffic ahead or reroutes me if a road is closed. GM never says “Good luck out there,” “may the odds be ever in your favour” or “Motorcyclists take care!”

Jesus promises that He never leaves us. He promises us that we can have the full love of God and presence of God in our lives by loving God with our heart minds soul and strength and loving our neighbours. We have not got to be perfect, we just have to attempt be connected by love.

It is not a sign saying take care. It is not even GM in my ear telling me the way. It is the love of God moving in to each of us and staying with us, whatever.

But very often life is busy and hard and we get distracted and pushed about and begin to believe that we are on our own. We begin to “take care,” that is we live with care and concern and worry and adverse to risk and faith and trust. What is more we offer the same advice to others, as the only possible options in a scary world.

But Christians, we have been given the gift of prayer.

Jesus was known for his habit of heading off on his own to pray, to get away from the distractions and care and be close to His Father. Jesus could not have told us, shown us or given us all that he did had he not had that closeness with the Father. And if Jesus needed that, so do we. We must get away from taking care to pray.

Prayer is the way we stay connected to the love of God, it is also by some mystery the way God chooses to move in the world. So when we pray, things begin to happen, even if not what we had anticipated.

I would like to invite my friend Beverly Green up to join us now. Bev has a long association with HMP Wandsworth where she has been part of the team and worshipped on Sundays for some time and she is also particularly interested in prayer. So she has kindly agreed to be here so I can ask her some questions

- How does prison work and prayer go together?
- You have just been on a prayer course – It sounds a bit weird to study prayer, what was it like?
- Thinking of your own life, how do you recognise the presence of God and how does that help you?

We are about to have a period of prayer in this deanery hosted here at St Michael's. We have the room in the crypt, we have the hosts to welcome and now we need you to come and pray for an hour, or more if you like.

There will be resources to help you, children are welcome and you cannot get it wrong! But we are doing it to respond to Jesus' invitation to love God and keep God's commands. The greatest command is love, love of God and neighbour. Giving an hour or so to pray for the peace of the world, for the needy and elderly and poor in our borough and for 5 friends to know for the first time that God loves them so much that God came and died for. That God's love is so perfect that death was overcome and that God's love is so generous that we are all invited into this new life God offers them – that is a great way to spend some time.

There will be no sign above the entrance saying "Take Care." But as you go out you might hear the voice of Jesus say, "Take me."

Amen.