



THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING
SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2016

TRADITIONALLY IN ENGLAND THIS SUNDAY IS CALLED “LOW SUNDAY.” THE DERIVATION OF THIS IS UNCERTAIN. WITH THE GREAT RESPECT I HAVE ALWAYS HAD FOR THE BRITISH, WHICH I RETAIN, MY STRONG FEELINGS ARE THAT THERE CANNOT BE A LOW SUNDAY. EVERY SUNDAY IS VITAL TO OUR FAITH. AND IF WE USE OUR CHOIR AS AN EXAMPLE, ONE COULD CALL THIS SUNDAY BASED ON OUR CHOIR’S WORK; “MAGNIFICENT SUNDAY.”

IN ROME THE WHOLE WEEK WAS KEPT HOLY, NO ONE ENGAGED IN SECULAR BUSINESS AND EVEN SLAVES WERE NOT PUT TO WORK. ORIGINALLY THE OCTAVE ENDED ON SATURDAY, BUT NOW THIS FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER IS PART OF THE EASTER FESTIVAL.

THE GOSPEL FOR THIS DAY CONTINUES THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION. IT PASSES FROM THE DISCOVERY OF THE EMPTY TOMB IN THE EARLY MORNING OF EASTER DAY, THE APPEARANCE OF THE RISEN LORD TO HIS DISCIPLES IN THE EVENING OF THE SAME DAY AS RECOUNTED IN ST. JOHN’S GOSPEL. HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE’, TO ASSURE THEM THAT IT WAS HE, THEIR CRUCIFIED MESSIAH, WHO WAS PRESENT WITH THEM. NOW RISEN, THE WORK, WHICH HE HAD BEEN SENT TO DO WAS COMPLETE AND SO, AS HIS FATHER HAD SENT HIM, HE SENT THE APOSTLES. CHRIST’S COMMISSION TO THEM IS THE ASSURANCE THAT THE WORK THAT HE HAD COMPLETED WAS NOT FOR

ONE GENERATION BUT WOULD BE CONTINUALLY SHOWN FORTH TO ALL PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES.

IN TODAY'S GOSPEL WE SEE A DEEPLY IMPORTANT TIME OF JESUS WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

(FROM THE WRITING *JESUS SPEAKS*) "I AM WRITING TO YOU AT THE MOMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN YEAR WHEN, WE PAUSE AND LOOK BACK ON THE RICHEST CLUSTER OF SUCH SPIRITUAL FACTS EVER REVEALED TO MAN. FROM THE VERY BEGINNING THE CHURCH HAS BEEN SURE THAT THE SERIES OF EVENTS WHICH WERE WORKED OUT TO THEIR INEVITABLE END IN HOLY WEEK, SUM UP AND EXPRESS THE DEEPEST SECRETS OF THE RELATION OF GOD TO MEN."

THAT MEANS, OF COURSE, THAT CHRISTIANITY CAN NEVER BE MERELY A PLEASANT OR CONSOLING RELIGION. IT IS A VITAL BUSINESS AND COMMITMENT. ITS SUPREME SYMBOL IS THE CRUCIFIX, THE TOTAL AND LOVING SELF-GIVING OF MAN TO THE REDEEMING PURPOSES OF GOD.

BECAUSE WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD WE ALL HAVE OUR PART TO PLAY IN HIS REDEMPTIVE PLAN; AND THE CHURCH CONSISTS OF LOVING SOULS WHO HAVE ACCEPTED THIS OBLIGATION. THE ONLY REAL CONTRIBUTION WHICH WE CAN MAKE TO THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD, IS TO FOLLOW JUST LIKE OUR MASTER.

IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT THE DISCIPLES CONTINUED TO MEET IN THE UPPER ROOM WHERE THE LAST SUPPER HAD BEEN HELD. THEY KNEW THE INTENSE BITTERNESS OF THE

JEWES WHO HAD BROUGHT ABOUT THE DEATH OF JESUS, AND THEY WERE AFRAID THAT THEIR TURN WOULD COME NEXT. SO THEY WERE MEETING IN FEAR, LISTENING FOR EVERY STEP ON THE STAIR AND FOR EVERY KNOCK AT THE DOOR, LEST THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SANHEDRIN SHOULD COME TO ARREST THEM TOO. AS THEY SAT THERE WITH JESUS IN THEIR MIDST, HE GAVE THEM THE EVERYDAY MIDDLE-EASTERN GREETING: "PEACE BE TO YOU." IT MEANS FAR MORE THAN: "MAY YOU BE SAVED FROM TROUBLE." IT MEANS: "MAY GOD GIVE YOU EVERY GOOD THING." THEN JESUS GAVE THE DISCIPLES THE COMMISSION WHICH THEY AND THE CHURCH'S PEOPLE MUST NEVER FORGET.

FROM WILLIAM BARCLAY:

1. HE SAID THAT AS GOD HAD SENT CHRIST FORTH, SO HE SENT THE DISCIPLES. HERE IS WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR B. F. WESTCOTT CALLED "THE CHARTER OF THE CHURCH". IT MEANS THREE THINGS:
 - a) IT MEANS THAT JESUS CHRIST NEEDS THE CHURCH, WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT PAUL MEANT WHEN HE CALLED THE CHURCH "THE BODY OF CHRIST" (EPHESIANS 1:23; I CORINTHIANS 12:12). JESUS HAD COME WITH A MESSAGE FOR ALL PEOPLE, AND NOW HE WAS GOING BACK TO HIS FATHER. HIS MESSAGE COULD NEVER BE TAKEN TO ALL OF US, UNLESS THE CHURCH TAKES IT. THE CHURCH IS TO BE A MOUTH TO SPEAK FOR JESUS, FEET TO RUN UPON HIS ERRANDS, HANDS TO DO HIS WORK. THEREFORE, THE FIRST THING THIS MEANS IS THAT JESUS IS DEPENDENT ON HIS CHURCH.

b) IT MEANS THAT THE CHURCH NEEDS JESUS. PEOPLE WHO ARE TO BE SENT OUT NEED SOMEONE TO SEND THEM; THEY NEED A MESSAGE TO TAKE; THEY NEED A POWER AND AN AUTHORITY TO BACK THE MESSAGE; THEY NEED SOMEONE TO WHOM THEY MAY TURN WHEN THEY ARE IN DOUBT AND IN DIFFICULTY. WITHOUT JESUS, THE CHURCH HAS NO MESSAGE; WITHOUT HIM IT HAS ONLY SOME POWER; WITHOUT HIM IT HAS NO ONE TO TURN TO WHEN UP AGAINST IT; WITHOUT IT HAS NOTHING TO ENLIGHTEN ITS MIND, TO STRENGTHEN ITS ARM AND TO ENCOURAGE ITS HEART. THIS MEANS THAT THE CHURCH IS DEPENDENT ON JESUS.

c) THERE REMAINS STILL ANOTHER POINT. THE SENDING OUT OF THE CHURCH BY JESUS IS PARALLEL TO THE SENDING OUT OF JESUS BY GOD. BUT NO ONE CAN READ THE STORY OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL WITHOUT SEEING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND GOD WHICH WAS CONTINUALLY DEPENDENT ON JESUS' PERFECT CARING AND PERFECT LOVE. JESUS COULD BE GOD'S MESSENGER AND THE INSTRUMENT OF CHRIST, ONLY WHEN IT PERFECTLY LOVES HIM AND PERFECTLY OBEYS HIM. THE CHURCH MUST NEVER BE OUT TO PROPAGATE ITS OWN MESSAGE; IT MUST BE OUT TO INSERT THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST. IT MUST NEVER TOTALLY FOLLOW POLICIES OF HUMAN DEIVING; IT MUST BE OUT TO FOLLOW THE WILL OF CHRIST. THE CHURCH FAILS WHENEVER IT TRIES TO SOLVE SOME PROBLEM

IN ITS OWN WISDOM AND STRENGTH, AND LEAVES OUT THE WILL AND GUIDANCE OF JESUS CHRIST.

2. JESUS BREATHED ON HIS DISCIPLES AND GAVE THEM THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT, WHEN JOHN SPOKE IN THIS WAY, HE WAS THINKING BACK TO THE OLD STORY OF THE CREATION. THERE THE WRITER SAYS: “THEN THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN FROM THE DUST OF THE GROUND, AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE; AND THE MAN BECAME A LIVING BEING” (GENESIS 2:7). THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS LIKE THE WAKENING OF LIFE FROM THE DEAD. WHEN IT COMES UPON THE CHURCH, IT IS RE-CREATED FOR ITS TASK.

3. JESUS SAID TO THE DISCIPLES: “IF YOU REMIT THE SINS OF ANYONE, THEY

ARE REMITTED; IF YOU RETAIN THEM, THEY ARE RETAINED.” THIS IS A SAYING WHOSE TRUE MEANING WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO UNDERSTAND. ONE THING IS CERTAIN – NO ONE CAN FORGIVE ANYONE ELSE’S SINS. BUT ANOTHER THING IS EQUALLY CERTAIN – IT IS THE GREAT PRIVILEGE OF THE CHURCH TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS TO MEN AND WOMEN. SUPPOSE SOMEONE BRINGS US A MESSAGE FROM ANOTHER, OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE VALUE, OF THAT MESSAGE WILL DEPEND ON HOW WELL THE BRINGER OF THE MESSAGE KNOWS THE SENDER. IF SOMEONE PROPOSES TO INTERPRET ANOTHER’S THOUGHT TO US, WE KNOW THAT THE VALUE OF

THAT PERSON'S INTERPRETATION DEPENDS ON THE CLOSENESS WE HAVE TO
THE OTHERS.

THE APOSTLES HAD THE BEST DIRECTION TO BRING JESUS' MESSAGE TO ALL PEOPLE,
BECAUSE THEY KNEW HIM BEST. WE TOO MAY DO THE SAME THINGS WITH THE
COMPASSION AND LOVE GOD HAS GIVEN TO US.