

## **SERMON – Rev Nathan Thorpe**

### **John 14:1-4 – ‘Times Like These’ & The Way, The Truth, and the Life**

Do you remember when I played ‘What’s My Name’ by the Ting Tings for a sermon on John? A song that puts this verse into context for me is by the Foo Fighters. Written by Dave Grohl, lead singer and ex-Nirvana drummer - re-released his song ‘Times Like These’ this week featuring famous names for charity.

The words of the chorus go: It's times like these you learn to live again  
It's times like these you give and give again,  
It's times like these you learn to love again,  
It's times like these time and time again.

This morning's reading may be familiar to many of you as it is most often read at funerals – and I think it may have amused the Vicar when she was setting the rota for my last Sunday at St Peter's! John 14 also contains one of the verses that is imprinted on my heart the most – John 14 verse 27. You can go and look it up for yourselves!

Although we may recognise this reading from sad occasions – it is often selected to provide comfort and hope to people at a time when they feel there is not a lot of either of those. In John's gospel it is positioned after the last supper and before they all go out to the garden of Gethsemane – towards all that particular road would entail for Jesus.

It is a good song, and a great reading for those who stand on a threshold of new ways of understanding, belonging or living because it helps us think about what we will be moving towards in future – and about what we understand that to look like in the life of Jesus.

When we look to the future, for a way, for truth, and for life beyond our current restrictions, the buzzword going around at the moment is ‘phased’. It will be vital in the coming months; and vital to listen and learn how to incorporate the voices of the vulnerable, at risk and in distress that we have become more aware of in these past few weeks.

Amidst increasingly weary days and weary people, when the frictions is creeping up, we can be shaping what will come out of all our time apart from each other. This is often true when we say good-bye to someone – we reflect on what their example, words and actions, have taught us – and what we will learn about ourselves and our communities through their absence.

To help us, the way that Jesus lived is still the most powerful message for his followers. Thomas provides the question we all want to ask – showing his independence of thought again. Even while we fall out over method and application; the central message of Jesus' life is to love God and our neighbour, with all our heart, mind, and strength and like ourselves. That is the hardest, but most worthwhile, task to which we are called. Especially as Jesus does not put any conditions on that love or to who it is shown.

It may be helpful to remind yourselves that Mother Theresa was known to pray, ‘Lord, may I see you today in those who are sick; though you hide yourself behind the disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you in them’. Some would say that she was all of those things too; yet inspired millions with her work, even when in the depths of spiritual drought. In this reading, Jesus' words have the ability to overcome any self-indulgent pride relating to our faith. We aren't succeeding in ways that people of other faiths or none are failing at. That isn't the point. The point is that even when it feels we are overwhelmed by the vastness of the universe, or feel that humanity lurches from disaster to disaster without seeming to learn, or even when grief makes our worlds stop; Jesus is strong.

The second verse to 'Times Like These', goes:

I, I'm a new day rising  
I'm a brand new sky  
To hang the stars upon tonight  
I am a little divided  
Do I stay or run away  
And leave it all behind?

Our role as churches is to pursue the impossible: - a temple of living stones (a contradiction in terms!) built on Christ the sure foundation. Our challenges are to be durable yet creative, just like the God in whose image we believe humanity has within us.

One interesting thing that I have seen while our church buildings are closed is some research that more people have been accessing online services – and that more people than ever have searched something related to 'prayer' on the internet. Further research suggested that if a church has an online presence, people view it an average of 7 times before they come. If so, what does that help us learn as we reach out to others? What might we ourselves have to say about prayer? If our aim is to be a community seeking to follow his example then how do we show that a heart of love like that of Christ beats in us collectively?

That thought brings me onto another. The chorus I quoted at the start also reflects how I feel about having been St Peter's curate. You have been such a supportive congregation (I may add 'tolerant' too!). However, I am incredibly fortunate that to have started my ministry with St Peter's. I was so daunted when I came here; but I have learnt so much. Although this is not the way any of us wanted to say farewell, 'thank you' is such an inadequate word for your generosity, warmth and time towards Poppy and I. Please know that the opportunities, experiences, and especially the people (yes – that means you) that make up St Peter's will be cherished and appreciated even far beyond my retirement!

There is a prayer by the Dutch humanist Erasmus which sums all this up, and which I want to pray for both St Peter's and St Giles – in the midst of our 'Times Like These':

O Lord Jesus Christ, who art the way, the truth, and the life. We ask thee to suffer us not to stray from thee who art the way. Nor to distrust thee, who art the truth. Nor to rest in any other thing but thee, who art the Life. Show us by your Holy Spirit what to believe, what to do, and where to take our rest.

Thanks to God, and thanks to you all again. Amen.