

John 15.26-27; 16.4b-15, Acts 2.1-21; Ezekiel 37.1-14  
Pentecost: 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018  
10 a.m. at St. Andrew's Totteridge

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer (Ps.19:14).*

I want to celebrate the fact that The Presiding Bishop of the US-based Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, whose church is part of the worldwide Anglican communion, was invited to give the address at the royal wedding yesterday. Not just because this was a lovely opportunity for outreach and embrace to worldwide multi-ethnicity and all our American cousins, but because Michael Curry takes seriously the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate, that Jesus said he would leave us after his Ascension and which we celebrate at Pentecost.

When he returns to the US, Bishop Michael will join a march on the White House by Christian leaders this month as part of an ecumenical movement to “reclaim Jesus”. Moved by the Spirit on this day of Pentecost, and believing that his message for America has deep relevance to our own situation here in the UK, I want to give a large part of my sermon over to him today and the declaration he has signed.

The march, on Thursday 24 May, will mark the launch of the *Reclaiming Jesus Declaration*, which begins with a stark warning: “We are living through perilous and polarising times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.”

It continues: “It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else – nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender,

geography – our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. We pray that our nation will see Jesus’ words in us. ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35).”

The declaration sets out a number of concerns, including of President Donald Trump’s “America first” policy. The declaration describes it as “a theological heresy for followers of Christ,” and goes on to say: “while we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal.

“We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth’s resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God’s children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these.”

The declaration says: “Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with ‘For God so loved the world’ (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives.”

The strongly-worded statement also hits out at gender-based violence and misogyny, saying: “we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class” (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example

for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world – to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ."

“Therefore, we reject misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches.... We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.”

It also hits out at lies and falsehoods, saying: “truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. . . “Therefore, we reject the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined.

“The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation’s highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behaviour of families and children. The normalisation of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.”

Bishop Curry has co-signed the declaration, alongside 22 other U.S. Christian leaders. Their declaration concludes by saying “we are deeply concerned for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper – deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk. . .

“Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ - to whom be all authority, honour, and glory".

So this Pentecost, I join Michael Curry in calling upon all Christians to remember that our identity in Jesus precedes every other identity, and that everything we do must therefore conform to the Holy Spirit of Truth.

*inc. extracts from an article on the Anglican Communion News Service website posted on May 11th 2018:  
<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/05/president-trumps-america-first-policy-is-a-theological-heresy-for-followers-of-christ.aspx>*

## John 15.26-27; 16.4b-15

26 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.<sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. <sup>4</sup>But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

12 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

## Acts 2.1-21 The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.<sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.  
<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

### **Ezekiel 37.1-14    The Valley of Dry Bones**

**37** The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.'  
<sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you,

and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup>I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'  
<sup>10</sup>I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely."  
<sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

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