

Sermon, St Andrew's Rogation + Christian Aid 2021

Almighty God, help us now to think and pray about asking, for ourselves, for all in need, and for the glory of Thy Name, in Thy love, one Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” asks the Psalmist. We may feel similar about many of our Church feasts just now, when some of us can’t be physically present, and we still can’t sing.

Rogation and Christian Aid are perhaps particularly strange this year. At Rogation (from the Latin *rogare*, to ask, in the traditional Gospels for this day, Matthew 7.7/Luke 11.9), we *ask* for our Parish, for whatever literal or metaphorical crops are planted here; and would historically “beat the Bounds” to reinforce knowledge, love and possession of the church’s territory! However, our parish boundary, though very green (we once encountered some nesting swans by the boating lake in Exhibition Park), is rather long, and beating the Bounds has never become a “mass movement” for us, though it’s becoming a marvellous photographic map history of the changes in the city centre, and something which is particularly fascinating for, enjoyed and loved by new members of the church getting to know the parish. Perhaps it’s case of the Anglican advice “all may - some should - none must”! I confess I drove the Bounds last year, on a cold, grey day, when it was very sad to see everything so deserted, bleak and bare, reminding me of Wordsworth: “dear God! The very houses seem asleep, and all that mighty heart is lying still”.

Worship and preaching have many impossible tasks, including the call to restore our vision of God and His world. What's *your* vision of this Parish - where are the landmarks on your mental map of it?

Mark Toney's? St James' Park? Certain licensed premises?! This year, perhaps look at a map of the city centre (or simply close your eyes and remember), please pray for those places and people, and let the ripples of prayer widen out to embrace all this Parish.

Would that this spring was as warm as the last! Though much of the city's life is starting to return, much is still rightly impeded, many sectors have suffered grievous wounds and will be long to heal, and many (out of sight) are still short of money, work, or confidence. Please, therefore, "of your charity", pray for the huge needs of our Parish at this time - for those working and healing in the RVI, for all the diversity of our common, commercial, cultural, social and sporting life; and let's continue to ask the Lord what "building back better" might mean for us all here.

- and, when you've restored your vision of the Parish, let's try to do the same for Christian Aid week! I'm sorry I find it hard, on this subject, to avoid a hint of politics - but something's preying on my conscience, and I should "neither dissemble nor cloke" that from you: my father, now alone in Liverpool, has - like many of us - run out of things to talk about, and found that his perspective has shrunk greatly in the last year: as he says, "this is what my life has become" (trying to find rubber gloves, or whatever) - and he supported the Government cut in foreign aid, saying "we need the money": but, unfortunately, so does everyone else - they're all "in the clarts" too! (If you don't know what "clarts" are, do ask - but perhaps *outside* church...) We call ourselves a Christian country, and are still the 6th richest in the world (though I'm sure *I've* not got

it all - have you?!) - and, with that great privilege, unfortunately goes great responsibility to those worse off than us: which is still most other people on the planet! I was particularly sad to see the effect of our cuts on a refugee camp in the Congo - can we honestly say that we're poorer than that? If we can afford more nuclear warheads... I worry what on earth our Lord will say to us when He comes - what do you think?

It is so tempting, and easy just now, for our perspective to shrink, and our horizons to lower: yet, when we retreat from engagement with the world, it doesn't go away - someone else with fewer principles merely fills the vacuum less kindly, as with Russia in Syria. Can we really say that the world is a better place for our disengagement from it? Poet Philip Larkin was definitely no socialist (he wrote some most unpleasant words on that subject!), yet even he wrote of the shame of "bringing soldiers home for lack of money" - "we want the money for ourselves" - "nobody minds" - "this is all right"... "Our children will not know it's a different country. All we can hope to leave them now is money".

Beautiful Psalm 121 and the great Epiphany reading, Isaiah 60, both speak of "lifting our eyes". In restoring, broadening and *lifting* our vision in prayer, today Wesley's invitation to *ask* seems appropriate (from an unsung verse of "Soldiers of Christ") - "extend the arms of mighty prayer, ingrasping all mankind".

On the Cross, Christ spreads His arms wide to embrace the entire world. On this day of asking, for our Parish and planet, let's widen our vision, the reach of our prayer, and be ambitious in asking - for us in this place (however scattered), the good of all in need, and the glory of God's Name. *In that strong, sweet and saving Name, one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, AMEN.*