

When ?

5 6 11

O God the king of glory,
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place where Christ has gone before

My text may be found in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 and verses 6 & 7: 'So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel ?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."'

The holiday season is upon us. We have just finished the English Schools' Half Term and June, July and August stretch temptingly before us. Do you remember what it used to be like to get in the car to go for an outing with the children in the back but without the benefit of i phones, game boys or personal DVD players to distract and amuse them ? No sooner had you left than the cry would possibly go up from your little ones, already bored by the journey, 'Are we nearly there yet ?'

One of the defining characteristics of human beings is our sense of the passage of time. As we get older, we have a sense of our lives stretching out behind and before us. We have watches; we know what day of the week it is; we know what

month we are in and we know the year. We have the ability to look forward in time to a future treat and I know my birthday is now less than three months off. So it should come as no surprise that the disciples should ask the risen Lord Jesus 'when?'. 'When will you restore the kingdom to Israel?'

It's a good question. Perhaps it no longer has the power for us as it did for those first Jewish disciples. An independent state of Israel under a divinely appointed ruler was what all Jews had longed for since the time of the Exile to Babylon. It was an essential part of their theological understanding of the covenant between God and his Chosen People, Israel. So is it not perfectly reasonable for the disciples to ask Jesus whom they knew to be beyond any shadow of a doubt God's Messiah, God's anointed Son, when God the Father would fulfil what he had promised his children?

But instead of being told what they would like to have known, they are told in no uncertain terms that it is none of their business. The time is not for them to know; God's timing remains a mystery. Instead they are being given a task: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. (1v8).

So instead of knowing when the end time will be; the fixed time for which we pray daily when we say in the Lord's Prayer, 'thy kingdom come', the disciples are being given something to do: to go and tell other people the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God our Saviour and that through the Son and in the power of

the Holy Spirit, God our Father in heaven has made himself known to us his children. It is not the answer they wanted: instead of knowing when, they are being told what they need to do and how they will be able to do it: to be witness to the truth inspired by the Holy Spirit who will be with them, alongside them, encouraging, informing and inspiring them.

So let me leave you with this interesting thought on which to reflect. As creatures in time, we are necessarily aware of the passage of time so it is perfectly natural to want to know when the end-time will be. But fact is, only God knows when so the next time someone says to you that they know that the world will end last week, next week or this October, then they clearly don't ! There is no doubt one day our world will end but it is not for us to know when. Instead we have a clear duty, a clear vocation, to make known the truth of our faith, encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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H: Sermon 23: When

