

writers, Shirley Erena Murray, who died on January 25th this year, and Colin Gibson, b. 1933. I never met Shirley, who wrote the words, but Colin, who wrote the tune, is a fascinating person to talk to or rather, to listen to, because he never stops. (Another New Zealander, Richard Gillard, who wrote *Brother, Sister, Let me serve you*, was born in Malmesbury, and emigrated when he was three). In the new A & M Hymn Book there is no section headed "Rogationtide", as there was in older books. *Touch the earth lightly* comes under the heading "Creation and the environment". Sitting with Colin a few years ago, on the steps outside Liverpool RC Cathedral, I ventured to suggest that his hymns perhaps tend to be idealistic, almost militant, social commentaries, rather than explicitly Christian hymns. He was good enough to say I might have a point. Could the same criticism be made of Shirley's words, below, even if she does get around to God half way through? The tune, called *Tenderness*, is easy to pick up, but we have to learn it twice, because Colin puts it into the minor key for the second verse, to match the tone of the words:

*Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.*

*We who endanger, who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster clouds of disaster --
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!*

*Let there be greening, birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.*

*God of all living, God of all loving,
God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,
teach us, deflect us, Christ reconnect us,
using us gently and making us one.*

Sixth Sunday after Easter and Rogationtide.

As we walk the Parish bounds this Sunday, we pray for God's blessing on our community that the people who live and work in Harnham may know the depth breadth and height of God's love. May we be agents of this blessing in our community.

Readings: Genesis 8 v 20 - 9 v 17 Acts 17 v 22-31 John 14 v 15-21

A Prayer for Rogationtide.

*Remember Lord,
your mercy and loving kindness towards us.
Bless this good earth and make it fruitful.
Bless our labour,
and grant us what is needed for our daily lives.
Bless the homes of our parish and all who live within them.
Bless our common life and care for our neighbour.
Hear us good Lord. Amen*

I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper that he may abide with you forever.

(New King James Bible).

Come and explore the truth of the Gospel

We are loved, cherished, befriended, and accepted

This is the truth.

We are not alone: God's love is in us

This is the truth.

*(Adapted From *Fire and Bread*, Ruth Burgess)*

On the Sunday before the ascension of Jesus, we hear of Jesus promises to his disciples. Firstly of a Paraclete, secondly that he will not leave the disciples as orphans, and finally that he, Jesus, will return. These promises come as part of his farewell discourse to the disciples and act as a reminder of Jesus' care and continued presence for his disciples and the community of John as an early

church. Jesus love will abide with them, lead them into truth and help them even after his death and departure. These promises reiterate the final passages of Luke's gospel where Jesus says 'I am with you always.'

The Paraclete is the promise upon which I will focus. It has a plethora of meanings: to help, encourage, comfort and console, to call upon for help, to appeal on one's behalf. These meanings are translated differently in the range of Bible translations we use. The King James Bible describes the promise of a Comforter; the New Revised Standard Version describes the promise of the Advocate, the New International Version as Counsellor.

Perhaps what is important to remember, is John's emphasis that the work of God continues on from Jesus' life into the life of the disciples *and* the world.

Throughout the gospel of John there is an emphasis that to love Jesus means to keep Jesus commandments i.e. to follow his words and works. Can the disciples still love Jesus after he has gone? This passage clearly answers. Yes.

Jesus words and work will continue beyond his death, resurrection and ascension. Just as Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God so too will his disciples. Just as Jesus counselled through parables and teachings so too will his disciples. Just as Jesus comforted the widow and orphan so too will his disciples. Just as Jesus was an advocate of the excluded and poor for justice so are his disciples. Just as Jesus is an advocate with God, so too are the prayers of the disciples. The indwelling love of God enables the disciples to continue his work.

Barret thinks that the terms Paraclete refers to the proclamation of the words of God in Christian preaching and prophesy. We read of just one example in today's reading from Acts: St Paul's preaching in Athens. St Paul enters into a dialogue with the philosophy of the day which he uses to speak of the closeness of God and to explain and proclaim that Jesus is God.

There are many questions we could consider that arise from the readings today. Mine would be...

Firstly, what are these commandments Jesus taught so much!? 'Love God and love your neighbour as yourself' can often become an unexplored mantra. Often, due to our human frailty, we develop blind spots! We need to be challenged to revisit Jesus' commandments that are harder to follow. It is easier to know we have to be peace makers than to make amends and join in the struggle to hear both sides of a story; it is easier to know we are asked to forgive than to actively forgive; It is easier to give money to the poor than to be an advocate for the poor and get involved. All good reason to understand our need to abide in the depth of Jesus love.

Secondly, how wonderful that the early Christians knew the presence of Christ and the deep love of Christ to help, encourage, comfort and console, and to call upon as God's adopted children. The early disciples could have understood what was ahead of them and yet God enabled Peter to move forward with affirmations of love; Mary too recognised it was God who was speaking to her in love calling her name in the garden; Thomas was met with the love of Jesus' listening that held his believing and unbelieving and enabled him to preach the good news in India. Sometimes we learn more of love when we have to trust it- when it is stretched. I wonder whether we can learn more of the reality of God's love when we stretch ourselves to step out of our comfort zones in faith and action just like those early disciples.

What questions do these passage raise for you to think about and act upon?

HYMN MEDITATION FOR ROGATION SUNDAY M.G.S.

Rogation means asking, from the Latin word *ROGO* = I ask; as also in "interrogate". On Rogation Sunday we ask for God's blessing on the crops being sown at this time of the year. We could choose one of the harvest hymns, like *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*, but we may need a break from that. *Touch the earth lightly* is a joint effort between New Zealand's two great 20th-century hymn