*We continue to be in the season of Easter. This is the fifth Sunday of the season this year. We will mark Christ’s Ascension on May 24th and then Pentecost on May 31st.*

**Bible Passage: John 10. 1 - 11**

It’s said that if you are selling your home and want to maximise its attractions then you are well advised to bake bread and make fresh coffee just before viewing times. The attendant aromas have subliminal effects.

Nowadays, offering a cup of coffee can be a traumatic business. Once upon a time few people expected other than a mug of instant but now tastes are a whole lot more sophisticated. Who knew what a barrista is – ten years ago?

When we got married one of our wedding gifts was a coffee percolator. It was much appreciated --- but didn’t get daily use --- only occasionally – when we entertained. I was always slightly nervous as it bubbled away --- but there was no denying that the results – both aromatic and on the palate were very good.

Percolation is a lovely word --- as is distillation – each creating a sense of slow development leading to maturity and full flavour --- as the essence of something is extracted and intensified.

During lockdown my thoughts have turned often to St Ignatius of Loyola, whose story is well-known – and if you don’t know it then is easily accessed online. An adventurous young man who sought glory on the battlefield – Ignatius found himself confined to bed for many long months by severe injuries to his leg caused by a cannonball. Having exhausted all the books of romantic adventure in the house he was forced to turn to a small collection of spiritual works – reflecting upon the life and Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Ignatius soon found that his mood was not helped by dreams of adventure but that he found great solace, peace and hope in the spiritual reflections. They caused him to dream of different things. Thoughts of God in Christ percolated within him; consciously and unconsciously bringing him to a turning point which renewed his life.

Just the other evening I met a mother with her children, out enjoying their daily exercise. She reflected that there are gifts in the lockdown; not least in giving today’s children an insight into times when the motor vehicle didn’t dominate as it has come to do.

Recently, I have heard that sentiment echoed often and in many ways. Most people have a sense that the enforced slowing down of the rollercoaster affords us an opportunity to reflect and to reset “normal”; an opportunity which we will be very foolish to ignore.

The New Testament shows, again and again, that the disciples were stopped in their tracks by the apparent disaster of the crucifixion and by the bewildering experiences of resurrection. During this enforced time of reflection, Jesus’ followers took time to let it all percolate. What might it mean?

All four of the Gospels come out of that time of percolation and it is widely recognised that John’s Gospel has a character all of its own in that regard. Mathew, Mark and Luke weave their reflections and conclusions through their accounts of Jesus – but John moves into a deeper realm – as he seeks to articulate the distilled essence of the Gospel. Mark begins with Jesus’ baptism; Luke and Matthew with his birth – but John goes deeper --- linking Jesus with the very source and power of life.

*“ --- and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us --- full of grace and truth.”*

John’s Gospel – is of course the Gospel of Incarnation. In a masterful way, John emphasises that God is in Christ Jesus – and that God in Christ comes to enter into a deep and personal relationship with everyone and anyone who will accept his invitation – “Follow me!”

The natural and probably inevitable process of percolation and distillation of which I’ve spoken eventually resulted in what we know as doctrine – statements of belief. Thus, was a new religion born – a new theology which is Christianity. It took its place alongside others, like Judaism and was joined later by more, including Islam; to mention only some. In todays world, religions jostle for position with countless philosophies and the structures of religion with the structures, not least, of politics and economics.

But theologies and philosophies, structures and systems tend to become abstract and impersonal [just watch the film *“I Daniel Blake”* if you need persuading of that. But rather than allowing his understanding of Jesus to become so percolated and distilled that it loses its identification with its origin, John takes his distilled essence and puts it firmly back into the mouth of – the speech of Jesus.

Of course, the words of Jesus ---- the Word made flesh in Jesus --- brings great comfort and consolation --- but being in the presence of God in Christ also proves – time and again – to be uncomfortable, inconvenient and disturbing. It has always been so.

It is so much easier to avoid truth when it isn’t looking at you in the eye. It is also so much easier to embrace truth when it stands before you with open arms.

Lockdown has forced us all into social isolation. We are reminded of the importance of person to person engagement. True relationship cannot survive in the abstract and that teaches us an important lesson about our relationship with God. God has come in Christ to establish a personal relationship with all who will accept his invitation. Let us not ever allow ourselves to become socially distant from God in Christ.

Grace and mercy and peace to you from God the Father; God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen