

Sermon June 18th 2017 Matt.9v35-10v8

A few weeks ago, on June 4th to be exact..... I surprised myself!
I surprised myself by watching a pop concert!!

Now I have not had anything much to do with pop concerts since 1963 when in my student days in Leicester I went to neighbouring Nottingham..... To the Playhouse Theatre to see and hear The Beatles..... the new kids on the block at that time. I didn't actually hear much because of all the screaming..... but I did see them.

Since then pop concerts and me have parted company..... until June 4th.

On Sunday evening June 4th.....Pentecost Sunday as it happens.....I found myself watching the charity concert in aid of the victims of the suicide bombings in Manchester. It was called One Love and took place at the Old Trafford Cricket ground. Some of you may have watched it.

I had expected that I would 'give it a miss' very quickly..... but I didn't.
I didn't because it became immediately apparent to me that this was NOT simply a pop concert.

Yes, there were young artists and groups singing popular songs..... but it was about more than that..... there was a deep sense of the spiritual about it..... It was worship.

As Mr.Spock of the Starship Enterprise might have said..... 'It was worship Jim, but not as we at St. George's or many other Anglican churches know it!'

It was ,in my opinion.....worship.

Many of the young artists had deeply Christian roots and the theme of love overcoming evil; of love casting out fear could be traced throughout the event.

Justin Bieber, one of the young singers made an immediate connection with the thousands of young people in front of him when he said,

"I'm not going to let go of hope.

I'm not going to let go of love.

I'm not going to let go of God. Put your hand up if YOU'RE not going to let go..... and they did!

He continued...."God is good in the midst of the darkness; God is good in the midst of evil; God is in the midst, no matter what's happening in the world. God is in the midst and He loves you and He's here for you."

I was struck also by the words of the songs which were sung.....

"We will live forever", the thousands of young people sang..... Isn't that at the heart of the Christian message..... isn't that the Christian hope we are called to share?

As Robbie Williams sang his song 'Angels' many in the audience held up signs on pink paper with the message....'For our angels.'

They were showing respect for the 22 people who had been killed in the atrocity, and at the same time seemed to be indicating a hope that those whose lives had been so cruelly cut short would enjoy peace in a spiritual realm..... where one day there would be a joyful reunion of families broken and split apart. Isn't that what we hope for our families and friends?

There were no candles at this event.

But there was an amazing moment when, as it grew darker, suddenly the whole area was filled with lights..... tiny specks of light.

Torches on mobile phones had been switched on and held high and waved to and fro.

These were the candles of the young people..... Candles which shone brightly to scatter the darkness that had enveloped Manchester the previous week... and which still hung over the city as it coped in the best way it could with its grief and loss.

As I watched the young people singing along with the artists.....knowing every word of every song, I thought about what we had sung here that morning...

and thought that they probably would not have known one word of any of those beautiful Pentecost hymns sung here at St.George's and in churches throughout the land.

And that was the moment when I realised that for those young people.....

THIS event at the cricket ground was church for them.

This was their 'church without walls.'

As I reflected on that I remembered a comment made by a child when asked about Messy church.

The child said, 'THIS is my church..... In the church hall.....making things.....painting things..... singing songs.....moving about.....having fun.'

So church doesn't always have to be..... and for many it isn't..... in a building like this, however beautiful it might be.

Church can be anywhere; at any time; in any format.

When Jesus sends His disciples out as we have heard this morning....

He doesn't send them into the synagogues..... He sends them outside the walls , as it were..

He sends them into the towns and villages, to where people are.

He sends them out into the open air.....

Into the fields ready for harvesting.

But He warns them that though the harvest is plentiful..... the labourers are few.... And He urges them to pray to the Father to send out more labourers.

Jesus, I believe, would say, that still in our day, there are many fields full of different crops waiting to be harvested..... Old Trafford Cricket ground being one such field.

Now, I am quite clear that I am not called to fields full of young people... though some of you may be!

I am certain, however, that I am called into fields full of older people.....

those coming to the end of their lives.....growing frailer;

those with a dementia, living in residential care homes in Jesmond.

So, my question is...."Which field are you being called into? Which field are you in already?"

I can't describe to you the sense of the spiritual I had as I watched, and yes, took part in that concert.

But it made me ask questions about what it means for the church of which we are part....

About how WE connect, as those young musicians connected with our young people.

Dr. Pete Ward of the Dept. of Theology and Religion at Durham University asked what all this might mean for the church and suggested that,

One thing it might mean is that God has chosen to work OUTSIDE and BEYOND the confines of our congregations;

It might mean that a version of our faith is more widespread than Christians have been accustomed to assume was the case;

And it might mean that the task of the church is..... not so much to try to connect people to its own life..... but to find a way to catch up with the life that is beyond its doors.

If we agree with that thinking..... it might lead us to realise that different crops in their different fields are harvested differently.....

And that it is the job of the church to work out how that can best be done.

Amen.