

Reflections for the 6th Sunday of Easter

Putting us in the picture



In the last few days, while I was trying to tidy up my study, I rediscovered a copy of an ikon that I have had for a long time. An ikon is a picture that is made for a spiritual purpose, to express a truth about our faith. This particular one (pictured above) is sometimes called the 'Ikon of Friendship', and it is an image of Jesus standing alongside one of his disciples, with his arm around the disciple's shoulders.

As it happens, at around the same time as I found it, I saw a post on Facebook, from a man called Phil Stone, who is the Director of Scargill House, a Christian conference centre in the Yorkshire dales. A friend, who knew that this ikon was a favourite of his, had painted him a new version of it in which the disciple, the friend of Christ, was Phil himself!

In this Sunday's gospel reading (John chapter 14 verses 15 to 21) Jesus makes a promise to his disciples, assuring them of the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them for ever (verse 16). And he uses an unusual word – a word so unusual that some Bible versions don't even try to translate it, but just keep the Greek word which is 'paraclete'. It means something like 'to be called beside', and some other Bible versions have translated it as 'advocate', 'comforter', or 'helper'.

The promise for the first disciples, and for us, is the good news that God in Jesus Christ stands with us. Through the Holy Spirit, God is with us, alongside us, in everything that we have to face at the moment, and at every stage of our lives.

Just as the gift to Phil Stone put him in the picture – literally – portraying him as the person who knows the supportive presence of Christ alongside him, so we can put ourselves in the picture, or, perhaps we should say, let God put us in the picture, so that we can be assured that we are befriended by God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and that means that we will never stand alone.

Revd John Waller

God with us,
God the comforter, who stands alongside;
may we know your loving presence
through times of testing,
and in every step of our life's journey.
Amen.