

You'll never walk alone!

Acts 16⁹⁻¹⁵; Psalm 67; Revelation 21^{10,22-22⁵}; John 14²³⁻²⁹

*Come over...and help us.
[Acts 16⁹]*

In the week that the Hillsborough Inquest Jury has returned its verdict, there have been repeated snippets of the National Anthem of Liverpool - 'You'll never walk alone!'

But that isn't the case for everyone - the press and psychologist repeatedly tell us that loneliness is one of the most pressing problems in modern society. Some statistics from some of the recent research:

- ✦ The number of hours we spend socially interacting in person has fallen dramatically in the last 25 years. The number of people living in one person households has increased dramatically from 17% in 1971 to 29% in 2013, that's 7.7 million people.
- ✦ In research commissioned by Relate and Relationships Scotland in 2014, 42% of those polled said they did not count any of the colleagues at work as friends. Overall one in ten said they did not have a single close friend and 19% said that in the 2 weeks preceding the survey they had never or rarely felt loved.
- ✦ Half of all older people (about 5 million) say the television is their main company.
- ✦ 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week and 11% are in contact less than once a month.

But at the heart of our Christian faith is the simple fact that we are all in relationship with God and - because of that - in a positive relationship with one another. That is evident in all the readings for today:

- ✦ **Acts** begins with Paul (who was travelling with Timothy and Silas) who had a vision in which God spoke to him. This relationship wasn't imaginary - it was real enough for Paul to travel into an area he hadn't been before.

- ✦ **Acts** continues to show us that baptised Christians are a community - again it is practical rather than theoretical: Lydia, the seller of purple cloth, and took Paul home to stay with her family.
- ✦ The **Psalm** introduces a community of praise and worship - something that does us good and draws us closer to God and one another.
- ✦ **Revelation** is one long celebration of the community in heaven - a community that needs nothing and lacks nothing because God is there. It is a community that is safe because only those who have lived as God's people are there: their actions; their priorities; their focus it to live openly in God's light.
- ✦ **John** celebrates the community in God - God the Father who sent the Son; God the Son who lived and died for us; God the Holy Spirit (the Advocate) who comes from God and is God's ongoing presence with us.
- ✦ **John** also celebrates the community that is obedient to God and as a result of that Jesus promises **we will come and make our home with them.**
- ✦ **John** promises that we will never be alone because the Holy Spirit will be Jesus' presence with us. It is because of that that we experience his peace - **do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.**

Christians never walk alone:

They walk together with God

They walk together with God's people.

The togetherness of the Hillsborough families has been a very powerful example of a modern community - and we have so much more that joins us: not just death and questions, but death and resurrection and truth!