

Sermon 2nd before Lent 2015 Year B

Today's Gospel reading is so associated with Christmas it is strange to hear it again so soon. But within these three readings we hear of Wisdom, Word being at the beginning of creation, of humans and ultimately Jesus being made in God's image. Jesus here with us to reveal God's love to us.

Before we reach Lent, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection we are reminded of Jesus' place in creation and his role, his example, to us on earth demonstrates wisdom, he brings the word to us, he shows us the face of God.

When I was having to write university assignments I developed some wonderful distraction techniques, my oven had never been so clean. This sermon became like that, because it kept taking me to a place I didn't want to go, I read several lectionary reflections, I swept the floor, I made coffee, got food, but when it came to writing things down it had to be this, and so I offer it to you as something you can reflect on, read about, discuss, something that lives side by side with my faith but I am unable to articulate clearly.

For many people I know it is too difficult to believe in a God of love when both the Bible and life throws up so many problems, so much heartache, so many unexplainable tough situations. Situations that all the clichés in the world cannot help.

Wars fought in the name of God, children who die, natural disasters abominable atrocities how is that explained with belief in a loving, omnipotent God? Many theologians over the centuries have written about this as have non-Christians arguing about a need for faith.

Philip Yancey wrote a book called "Disappointment with God" and also one called "Where is God when it hurts?" In "Disappointment with God" he writes that every one of the 17 books of the prophets got round to a word of hope because human history is not an end in itself but a time of transition between Eden and the new heaven and earth still to be formed by God, but we are not just here marking time but should, as Christians be modelling the new heaven by reaching out in love, tackling injustice and corruption, caring for those less fortunate.

One of the arguments for continued suffering and evil being in the world is that God wants us to turn to him through love, by our own will. We have a choice to make, just as Adam and Eve had, just as Jesus had. George

MacDonald writes that “To love righteousness is to make it grow, not to avenge it ...throughout his (Jesus) life on earth he resisted every impulse to work more rapidly for a lower good – strong perhaps, when he saw old age and innocence trodden under foot.” Because even in Jesus time he did not heal everyone who was sick, people died and not all were raised from the dead like Lazarus. In the gospels the stories of Jesus’ miracles are about love not power.

Peter Vardy has written a book about “The Puzzle of Evil”, he feels that “most evil is due to factors within human control. God paid human beings the compliment of loving them enough to give them freedom and leaving them free to exercise it.” As Jesus finds in the temptations the devil works well in situations where we feel need, greed, pride, or self-absorption, a desire for transitory pleasures are a breeding place for evil. Vardy feels that his book is a call to action, to stand and fight evil although that will be costly.

In Brian McLaren’s book “We make the Road by Walking” he suggests that doubts can be expressed freely on Holy Saturday as it is probable that the disciples were thrown into despair and doubts, the Crucifixion had happened, Easter Sunday hadn’t arrived. For Christians who now know the story all we have to hang onto is that God is bigger than our biggest fear, disillusionment, sorrow or disappointment.

How though can we explain this to non-Christians or those struggling with their faith or to ourselves on a bad day?

The big question is, “IF” if there is a God why doesn’t he? Why can’t he? Where is he? How can he be love?

It’s difficult to explain that I choose to have faith, even though I can’t always answer the questions, I choose to believe in God, I choose to love God, even though its costly, I choose to try to obey even though that is difficult, I choose to pray and to believe that he hears my prayers; because life for me is better with God than without him, because he is the God who was, from the beginning of time, who is with us now and who will be with us in the new heaven and earth.

In one body, Christ brought two worlds together, unifying creation in a way it had not been since Eden. We can prove some details of his life and times, but we need more, want more. All any of us can do is to seek him, not to rely on old practices, habits or beliefs, events of the past; but to approach him afresh to make a new life within us. And that is all I can suggest to people who find

my faith so hard to understand, suspend disbelief and talk to him because it is through experience that faith grows, that love is felt, hurts are healed.