

Isolation Radio Talk

This other world, faith tells me it exists

Good morning. My theme for this morning is 'This other world, faith tells me it exists.' These past weeks have been confusing and dark, they have been filled with uncertainty, fear and anxiety - caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 and now the anti-Racism demonstrations - and not in the immediate future will this go away.

I have tried to take you through the events of Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost; mostly to say that something happened in real time; that 'something' transformed the course of the human story. Under the shadow of Covid-19 and of Climate Change people the world over have discovered they are not masters of the Universe or of destiny. Throughout time this has pointed sensitive and thinking people to wonder at the Creator; what meaning we can place on the one we call God. And in the spotlight of the Anti-Racism demonstrations, we again are discovering the unholy and wicked truth that white privilege remains systemic throughout the world and continues to erode what it means to be a human being. And this also, has directed caring and reflective people to wonder at the Creator; what does it mean when it is said that human beings are made in the image of God. The question will not go away. What is God like?

In the scriptures you can find unacceptable answers that caused scandal in Jesus time - 'he is the one eating with tax collectors and sinners'. It is still a cause of scandal still. Our society, poor in spirituality, still outdoes the Pharisees in self-righteousness condemnation. The desire to judge and condemn individuals and groups is as strong as ever. Perhaps more so; look at the stream of awfulness' on Social Media or public debate; we feast on the judged and the louder you condemn the more self-righteous you become.

At your best you will respond well to the teaching of the man from Galilee. Which of you does not feel good when Jesus gets the better of the Pharisee, the religious and political leaders of the day: when he says to the mourners, 'she is not dead, she is asleep'; to those who laugh at him you say - 'just wait and see.' If only all healing were so easy - just touch the hem of his robe and you will be cured. Jesus offered that searing image of human self-deception in the picture of the man with wooden beam sticking of his eye, who warns his brother that a speck of dust has just got into his.

Jesus was angry *for* others at the way the mighty manipulated, ignored or oppressed them. His human values seem so at odds with our days materialistic approach. We appeal to competitiveness, to dramatic success or failure; we divide society into winners and losers; into the privileged and the downtrodden: we know the cost of everything but the value of so little. Now, if you take Jesus of Nazareth seriously, you must look at what he said about himself. He was, he said, driven by his relationship with the divine mystery. I think this is why the writer of St John's gospel, so astounded by what Jesus was saying, begins with a meditation, where the image of Jesus is as the Word of God. His words and his actions had the power of divine command; it was that experience, that *amazing* experience that invites Christians to wonder at the relationship of God and Jesus.

It may or may not spark *your* imagination; if it does *you* will be astonished. I do not mean the astonishment of the first century bustling crowd or the disciples of John but *your own astonishment*

at the goodness of God; you *own astonishment* when you find him. What is true, is that those who followed him felt they were in touch with the very nature of things, the mystery behind the universe, to the 'love that moved the sun and stars' - those, are the Poet Dante's words from the 13th century.

Bishop John Taylor, in the 1980's says something else about this. He talks not about Christ being in the image of God, he talks of God being Christ-like. Through Christ, we know what God is like. Words like compassionate, merciful, forgiving, unconditionally loving; they describe Christ, he says, and therefore God. Christ too is great in his anger at injustice and oppression and the rejection of the little ones - little in stature; little in power; little in years - 'let them to come to me, do not try to stop them.' Christlike God therefore, is scathing about hypocrisies, the religiously deluded, the privileged, those who judge and condemn, operating from blind ignorance, prejudice and discrimination; those who heap great burdens on others because they do not understand their own hatred, their own fear, and have placed themselves on the top of the hierarchical pyramid of humanity.

The Good News - the Gospel - is that this Christlike God accepts you utterly and unconditionally as you go ever deeper into the well of divine mercy. If you feel deeply the pain God feels at so much suffering, so much violence, so much personal hatred, so more and more you are called to a way of obedience that is most often the way of the cross.

Let me caution you. Beware the 'God of the Gaps': putting God onto everything you don't know or understand; then one day you do know and you do understand; God becomes ever smaller until he disappears. So I say this to you; if God is like Christ and if God is the great mystery that sustains our Universe, our home, then to follow Christ, is ... the most wonderful ... and compelling vision a human being can have. It has solid political and social implications. At the heart of our Universe there seems to be a law of sacrifice. You are made from the dust of carbon deposits of burned out stars. From their destruction life emerged. This principle troubles the world still. Pain and anguish, life and death, is the price we pay for life itself; your soul cries out that *all* cannot be for nothing. Christian understanding of God is revolutionary; in it, is the quiet confidence, of the soul at peace, together with a passionate longing to know the generosity that brought our Universe, our Home into being. Such peace, such longing may account for that sense of loss we often feel.

I have no doubt whatsoever that a great self-giving love haunts the Universe. To discover and know that love is your quest and mine.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Here is a pray for each one of you.

Love one another
as God loves you.
Amen.