

Sunday 24th April 2022

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
we worship together in God.

Suggested hymn Christ has risen while earth slumbers
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Eternal God ever present in creation, we offer you our praise and thanksgiving.
You are the creator of all that we know and all that we have yet to discover, the stars in and beyond our galaxy, the planets which orbit the stars, and life itself in forms we recognise and forms we can only yet imagine. We wonder at creation and marvel at the mysteries we discover every day.
You are the sustainer of life, the Spirit indwells all life even when it is not recognised, the Spirit binds and connects life. Your love inspires and nurtures, holds and comforts, and is our model for living. When we forget and hurt others through our diminished love your forgiveness is at the heart of love and urges us to seek forgiveness and offer forgiveness. For your merciful love we offer our thanks and praise.
You bring forth new life and in the knowledge of you we are constantly invited to see life anew, to live life to the fullness of our humanity and to live life lovingly. In Jesus we find our way, our model of the fullness of humanity, our guide for the choices we make. As we worship together, we come to listen and to share, to learn through the Spirit and from each other.
Loving God, for all this we offer you our thanks, and we thank you for this new day, and the many people who will support us this day and every day.
Our Father....

Reading Psalm 150 (Psalms for a quantum world)

Praise God, the source of all being.

Praise God where you meet.

Praise God in creation.

Praise the works of God in the Spirit,
deeds which amaze and perplex
in their mysterious nature,
deeds beyond our expectations and imagination.

Praise God with all your creative skills,
sing and play music,
write and dance,
draw and paint,
praise God in the imagery of creation.

Praise God.

Let everything in creation be one
as we praise our source and our inspiration.

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Suggested hymn Sing of the Lord's goodness
Listen [here](#)

Reading John 20:19-31

Reflection

Certainty can be a dangerous attitude. Have you ever been so sure of something that your inflexibility causes a breakdown between you and someone else? Throughout history there have been cases of certainty that have caused war and unrest and today we are witnessing another instance with the certainty of Putin. When an individual or faction becomes so sure that they are right and have the 'truth' it can lead to war, genocide or terrorism.

In our reading which is so familiar we encounter doubting Thomas, or as I prefer to express it questioning Thomas. Thomas is uncertain about the other disciples' assertion that Jesus entered the locked room and says he will only believe it if he sees it with his own eyes. This happens we are told a week later and indeed Thomas does believe. His use of the term 'Lord', in the language used, is in fact a term for God, he views the experience as being in the presence of God, a powerful experience. However, let's go back a week and imagine for a minute the other disciples' reaction to Thomas's doubt. How would you have responded in a similar position; how do you respond if someone doubts something you really believe to be true? It can be difficult, but we need to remember that here is very little we can know for certain when it comes to defining God. We have mostly grown up with images of God that vary from a white man with a beard sitting in the clouds, a similar image pointing the finger of accusation, or a vague image of a kindly shepherd. None of these are very helpful in our twenty-first century world but what can we offer instead. God is other, God is beyond, God is mystery, God is everywhere and in everything are all true but also less than tangible. Even notions of resurrection are not without issues as we simply do not know but even without certainty we can believe, we simply need to acknowledge that belief is not truth.

Theologian and storyteller, Trevor Dennis, explores certainty in a story entitled terrifying certainties. Thomas has been questioning things again and the others are not happy with him, telling him that doubt is a sin, but God says doubt is better than terrifying certainties. It is something I have witnessed and experienced many times as Christians berate Christians for their belief or lack of it, expecting everyone to believe the same and be certain about it all but, each of us experiences God in a different way and so what we believe will have subtle, and sometimes not so subtle differences. Generations grew up being told it was wrong to question what they were told in Sunday School and later in church, but our faith grows when we explore and that means asking questions. I have long believed that we learn more about what we believe by discovering what we cannot believe.

So, what are the sort of terrifying certainties that God might show us if we asked. Imagine a prison in America where someone is about to be executed for killing an old woman whilst under the effects of hallucinogenic drugs, he has been waiting ten years or more for the day to arrive and outside the prison and Christians with placards and Bibles declaring the vengeance of God. My question is where does their certainty leave the mercy and love of God? There but for fortune go you or I.

Imagine yourself outside an abortion clinic where you witness a doctor arrive under escort simply to get to work because a crowd of Christians stands outside with placards and bibles accusing him of murder and using vile taunts. Where does that leave the notion of freewill in God's love. It is right that there are laws to control abortion but there are also circumstances where it is right that the woman has a choice.

Now imagine yourself in Jerusalem, a city at the heart of three faiths, but you witness armed Israeli settlers heckling their Palestinian neighbours and shouting that God gave the land to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and perhaps they would say the same to you if you lived there. However, it is not so simple and not so certain, and we are all children of God, and all three faiths share the same ancestry. It was only in 1948 that the state of Israel was created in that land. The examples could go on including sermons denouncing other faiths when the person has never met anyone of that faith and knows little about what they believe but is very certain that only Christianity is the true way to God. None of this is about love, rather it is about power. Rabbi Jonathan Saks reminds us that you cannot impose truth by force, and cautions that religion and power should not be confused.

