

Sunday 22nd January 2023

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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.

Introduction

How do you eat a tangerine?

Tich Nhat Hahn, a Buddhist Monk whose meditative stories have inspired many tells of a time when he was teaching mindfulness to a young American. On one occasion as they were chatting Tich offered the American a tangerine and he accepted it but continued talking about the many projects with which he was involved. As he chatted he peeled the tangerine and then broke off segments and popped them in his mouth as he spoke. Tich stopped him and said to him, eat your tangerine. The young man stopped and instantly understood. In his enthusiasm for mindfulness he had been eating mindlessly!

Now the tangerine had become real to him, he had become real and in that moment life had become real. Within that tangerine is all the promise of creation, and so as we eat it we dwell for a moment lost in wonder at creation. Many of us fall into the same bad habit as the young American, eating on the go, or while doing something else. It is important to take a moment and appreciate what we eat and to wonder at all that has gone into producing it. It is also healthier for us if we eat mindfully, taking time.

Living mindfully, means being aware, observing what is around us and taking the time to build relationships.

Readings Isaiah 9:1-4
 Matthew 4:12-23

Reflection

We are familiar with this reading from Isaiah in the context of Advent, and the coming of God's Kingdom. The days of gloom and despair will end – I wonder what we really visualise when we read this, it will be different for everyone. For many their remedy to gloom and despair will be the removal of the cause of their gloom and despair, a bit like a daylight bulb helps those affected by Seasonally Affected Disorder by providing more light in the winter. For some, it will be a reversal of fortunes, and often this equated to winning the lottery.

However, an end to gloom could mean a change in attitude. Gloom and despair are often the result of comparing your circumstances to those of others, particularly for those sucked into the myth of social media reality.

For centuries those living in the developed world have viewed the lives of those living in less developed countries through the lens of their own lives, and have often expected people to be filled with gloom and despair. In fact, people living in different, and to our eyes less privileged circumstances are often far more content than many of the people around us. At least that was the case until the media became global and highlighted the injustice of the birth lottery. There has been an increase in unrest and we have seen a major increase in migration to those countries perceived to offer better opportunities.

The truth is that the distribution of resources around the world has been far from fair, giving rise to inequalities which are unjust but the solution is not as simple as everyone winning the lottery. Perhaps the popularity of the lottery is an indicator of unrest even within the developed countries. If you have watched the film Bruce Almighty you may remember the scene where Bruce, deputising for God, creates an algorithm for answering prayer but the answer is always YES. This results in everyone who prays to win the lottery doing so but the share of the lottery becomes so small that riots break out.

The solution to gloom and despair is equal sharing of resources and opportunity which will lead to a world where there is no longer a desire for the lottery. Denmark, known as the happiest country, also has the smallest gap between wage levels, with few extremes in pay. There is a lesson there for the world.

This passage in Isaiah is looking forward, the hope being that the people of Israel will achieve this change in the world. Later Jesus picked up the challenge and encouraged his followers to work towards a fairer world. As followers of Jesus we are to be a light to the world and we are to act to alleviate gloom and

despair. Matthew is very good at connecting the life of Jesus with the prophecies of Isaiah, and in our reading he does just that. He records Jesus starting to work on this by calling his first disciples, and Matthew then gives a synopsis of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus travelled throughout Galilee, which included the areas known with Judaism as Zebulon and Naphtali, and he taught in the synagogues, proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom, and healed the sick. He took time to see what was happening and responded in love. This is the ministry to which we respond in our own location and it does seem a tall order but if we look at it closely we are called to share together and learn from each other. We bring our observations, the things we have become aware of in our mindfulness, and we share them so that together we can make a difference. Through talking about our understanding of God and Kingdom we can share our hopes and dreams for a better world. Through our actions, driven by the love that is God, a love which wants the best for everyone, we can change the world and bring the kingdom closer. In Buddhism there is a saying – to change the world you start with the next person who needs your help. Another saying is that if you seek happiness for others you may find it for yourself, when you light a lantern for someone else you also light your own path.

In the Charles Mackesey story, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, the horse reflects that everyone is a bit scared, but we are less scared together. When we work together we are stronger, at the same time working together is a powerful message to the world. When I was much younger we were taught the hymn Jesus bids us shine like a pure clear light, like a little candle burning in the night, in this world of darkness so let us shine, you in your small corner and I in mine. We have moved on and now we are called to gather with our candles and become a brighter light to the world. A light so powerful it can be seen from space. Working together is not restricted to churches, those from all faiths and none are concerned for the world and seek to alleviate the injustice which cause gloom and despair, we can learn from and help one another, bringing even more candles together. Jesus reached out beyond his faith, Jesus reached out to anyone in need, and we are called to do the same.