

Sunday 13th August 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.

I invite to take a moment, with a pencil and paper, and write down how you have heard or imagine people describe church. What do they think we do? Who do they imagine we are?

When you have finished sit and reflect on what this says about their perception of God?

Readings
Romans 10:5-15
Matthew 14:22-33

[Listen](#) to the song 'I believe'

Reflection

In our reading from Matthew's gospel we have another famous story. The disciples are in a boat whilst Jesus prays alone after another busy day. It is a story which also appears in Mark and John, but interestingly not Luke the Storyteller. Mark, thought to be the earliest of the written gospels does not mention Peter walking on the water, John does mention Peter but then gives the tale a quantum twist. Matthew tells the story in such a way that we are left wondering how it passed into the gospel tradition, who told the story? The disciples do not appear well in the story, would they have recounted it with all their embarrassment? Peter does not fare much better than the others, yes he got out of the boat but then he panicked. Would Peter have told this story? We don't know but all three gospel writers used the core of a story in a different way. Mark uses it to show that Jesus was responsive to need even when his plan was different. Matthew uses it to demonstrate that with Jesus we can do amazing things. John uses it to suggest that when we desire the stability offered by the way of Jesus amazing things happen.

In the book 'The Shack' there is an occasion where Jesus invites Mack to walk on water. In the film version this has a slightly different setting but it opens up some important questions. If you have The Shack you will find the bit on pages 139- 144

[Watch](#) the clip here.

This small section of the story explores belief, imagination and fear, it invites us to realise that living in the present is where we live with God and that dwelling on the past is not profitable nor is imagining a future in which our worst fears build a horrible reality. Imagination is a powerful tool.

There are many things we could do with imagination and belief - we could create heaven on the earth, the kingdom, but we don't, we could walk on water but we don't, we could share our experience of God but we don't. imagine the world if we did, imagine the message we would give if we lived in the power of the imagination.

Paul talks about the need for our witness in Romans 10, 'For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?'

We explored earlier the misconceptions people have of church and how those misconceptions can create a false picture of God. Where do you experience that feeling of God? For me, wide open spaces, blue sky and green grass colliding, and one particular place is on Rodborough Common, above Stroud in Gloucestershire. A wide open space with view across the valleys to the River Severn and the Black Mountains beyond. I have often spoken of how we might share our experience of God and I don't think it has to include anything too daunting. It could be about words or pictures, about a feeling but the important thing is that we share it so others can see God in their lives. Imagine a noticeboard filled with pictures or excerpts that have post-it notes next to them with the words I see God in... Someone using the building, perhaps waiting to pick up a child or attending a yoga class, is drawn to a picture recognising it as somewhere they have been. They see the words on the post-it and think, 'I felt something there but I never knew that was God'. An invitation to

wonder and imagine God differently has been offered.

Imagination is a powerful tool, a God given tool and yet we allow our imagination to be limited by fear. The message of Jesus can be distilled into three simple sayings. You are totally worthy, you are totally loved, and nothing can ever separate you from God.

If God is everywhere, present in everything then God is in us and we are a part of God. We have all the knowledge and wisdom of God but we have to remember how to access it, at the moment we get mere glimpses, moments when we discover we know something we didn't know we knew. If we are a part of God then we are part of the love that is God and so totally loved. If we are a part of God then we can never be separate from God and there is nothing we can do to cause a separation, although we can deny our oneness and choose to ignore our part in God.

We always have a choice. We can get into the boat, experience bad weather and panic, imagining our worst fears realised. We can get into the boat, experience bad weather and remember that we are never alone and always a part of God and imagine the water calm. There is a real power in positive thinking and a positive outlook. It will not protect us from experiences that could ignite fear but it will steer us through to the other side.

Let us talk about our experiences of God, let us be careful in how we depict church and let us remember that we are church and if we don't want it to be stereotypical then we don't make it that way. Let us imagine the best example of church and make it the reality, and tell our story as an invitation for others to imagine God differently.