

Sunday 29th October 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.

Reading Deuteronomy 34:1-12
 Matthew 22:34-46

Reflection

How many times have you been to a funeral and thought 'well I never knew that'? How many times do we not fully appreciate the depth of a person until they are dead? Growing up my dad was a bit of a conundrum with which I struggled. He wanted to be asked for help but would not ask for help himself, rather he expected us to see that he needed help and to respond. When he died I was surprised to see another view of my dad in the letters and cards which poured in speaking of his kindness and how he would always help if he could. It made me stop and question where the conundrum sat in his life and I concluded that it was his way of teaching us to see need and respond, it might of helped if he had explained this to us!

In our reading from Deuteronomy we read of Moses death and then a statement of his life and work. His legacy. I wonder how Moses viewed his legacy. Our vision of things is very subjective. A few years ago there was a big stir about a dress which, because of the fabric with which it was made, was seen as different colours by different people. This passage made us wonder that the church's legacy might be and how people might view the church after its death – which I hope is a long way off but others see that differently. What sort of legacy are we trying to build together as church?

I invite to take some moments now to consider your dreams for the church, what do you dream of the church being and doing? Perhaps write those things on a piece of paper and share them with others from your church or simply in conversation and use them to explore future ideas you might do together as church.

I imagine that many of you may mention giving (charity), welcoming (hospitality) and I hope you might include questions which I believe are an essential part of our pilgrimage, it is in wrestling with the questions that we move deeper into God. Our reading from Matthew reminds us that questions are central to the gospel story – the questions asked of Jesus, the questions Jesus asked, and the place of questions in our journeying. Jesus often told stories that were intended to provoke questions – parables such as the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. In fact the purpose of parables is to raise questions without providing an answer other than that discerned by the listener.

All stories are a bit like that, we can all take something different from a story, see the story in different ways. Stories reflect life because we all respond differently to the same experiences, see things through the lens of our own experience.

Story – My friend the giant

Once upon a time, in a land far away lived a giant. He was a kindly giant, but people just saw a giant and remembered stories about fierce and terrifying ogres, and so they were afraid and stayed away. The giant became lonelier and lonelier and sad, and because he was sad and lonely he became frightened and in his fear he became angry, and when he saw people he shouted a lot and so he became what they imagined. Then one day a young girl wandered into the giant's forest. She was deaf and had not heard all the stories about the giant, so she did not fear him. She saw him chopping wood with an enormous axe and at the same time the giant saw the girl. He stopped chopping wood and shouted, waving the axe wildly above his head. The girl could not hear his shouting and imagined he was waving to her, so she went closer. The giant had not expected that and dropped the axe in amazement, it landed on his foot, and he began hopping in pain. The girl ran to him and gently held his foot, rubbing the rapidly forming bruise. The giant was amazed, here was someone who was not afraid of him, a friend. He reached down and took the girl's hand and so began a friendship. They shared many times together, the giant showing the girl the wonders of the forest and the girl showing the giant the wonders of friendship.

Others heard of the friendship and came to build their own friendship with the giant and soon he had a whole new family.

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Questions are all around us and it has always been thus. When I was growing up in the church in Milngavie we were encouraged to ask questions, about life, faith, belief and how they all came together. Through Bible Class I was introduced to the music of the Moody Blues and loved it all, grew up with it from that point. One of the tracks I remember was entitled Questions – it was in many ways a conundrum, a mix of two styles, a reminder that life is always a bit messy.

Music Questions by the Moody Blues [Listen here](#)

As we think about the legacy of the church we need to recognise the place of questions in what we do. Too many people think church is for people who have found all the answers, for people who are certain, when for me it is the opposite. Church is for those who are journeying through the questions of life, who sometimes have doubts and can be overcome with worries. Together we can wrestle with those questions and seek answers for today, share thoughts and insight from our experience and encourage one another towards the next question. I believe we need to spend more time talking together as church, and that is worship just as much as hymns and prayers, in fact talking can feed our prayers.

When I was in Gloucestershire I was involved in the early days of a program called Open the Book. Recognising that twenty years ago children had fewer opportunities to hear the stories of the Bible a system was devised for church folk to go into primary schools once a week and tell bible stories. It was a three year cycle so children would hear each story twice, and would respond to it differently as they grew. There was no teaching, just creative storytelling and an invitation to think about something the story provoked for a few seconds followed by a simple prayer which the children were invited to make their prayer if they wished by saying Amen at the end. Children loved this assembly, where possible we included some or all of them in the storytelling, teachers loved this assembly because it covered a part of the curriculum and because the children loved it. I was involved in two different groups, one in each town I ministered in, and those involved loved it also and could be very creative with props. We had two groups in each place so the commitment was once a fortnight in term time, and usually took about 45 minutes – ten minutes before to check we had everything in place, 15 minutes storytelling and twenty minutes after to prepare the next story, prop making and sourcing was extra. Open the book is still going and many churches are involved around the country.

Those stories provoked questions – what did it feel like, what does it feel like, what part do I play? Maybe we should experience Open the Book as church? As we look at the mission of the church we need to remember Paul's approach to mission – to get alongside folk and listen, then respond to need with love, gently. As Micah put it we should love justice, do kindness and walk humbly – that would be some legacy. The five marks of mission stated in five words – tell, teach, transform, tend and treasure – are about telling stories both bible and our own, learning together, making a difference and caring for and treasuring the whole of creation. As we share our vision and our dreams may we hold that mission, and how to do it, in our hearts and minds as we love God and our neighbour.