

Sunday 21st July 2024

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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 Mark 6:30-56

Reflection 1

This reading picks up from the disciples returning after their first venture out alone. They are full of stories, people and healings, successes and failures. Jesus is as usual surrounded by people and he gathers the disciples and suggests they get away for some quiet time together. Perhaps this is a model of what coming to church should be, a quiet place where we can reflect on our experiences and together try and make sense of what is happening.

For Jesus and the disciples it is not to be, they left by boat, and perhaps they made their way leisurely for we are told people noticed them leaving and guessing where they were heading, made their way on foot and arrived there before them. Jesus could not turn his back on their spiritual hunger and began to teach them, while the disciples looked on. I have often wondered why there is no mention of the disciples joining in at this point. Instead we once again have the motif of the disciples 'not getting it', as the day moves to a close and Jesus suggests they need to share food with the crowd. We know the story and have pondered the possibilities, everyone had brought food and shared it, a picnic in the park, or, Jesus created a different reality in which a little became enough through belief. We are told the disciples were surprised and yet the crowd was so great that only those at the front would have known how it all started and the rest would simply have received what was offered without wonder. How much are miracles hidden in the ordinary experiences of everyday life?

The story moves on and Jesus sends the disciples on ahead in the boat while he disperses the crowd and then goes up the mountain to pray. There is a mystery in the timeline, was it late afternoon when they set sail? We are told it was evening when Jesus saw the boat, caught in a storm, how long had the disciples been struggling, how far had they journeyed and where was Jesus when he saw them, had he walked along the shore. None of these questions have an answer in the text and then we are told Jesus did not approach the boat until morning, or sunrise, and was going to pass it by but the disciples saw him walking on the water and were terrified, imagining a ghost. The disciples must have been exhausted if they had struggled all night so perhaps it is not surprising that they were not seeing straight. It is a very confusing episode and not easy to draw out the meaning. The author has a purpose, perhaps we are to conclude that the presence of Jesus makes a difference for everyone wherever they are on their journey. Recognising the presence of God in our lives, may not smooth the path, or calm the storms but it does make a difference to how we deal with these things. Jesus said 'do not be afraid' and when we believe in the presence of God with us we are less likely to allow fear to distort things.

The story concludes with the boat reaching land and once again Jesus and disciples are surrounded by people who have come to experience a miracle.

Reading 2 Ephesians 2:14-22

Reflection 2

The themes of Jesus mission are interconnectedness, interdependence and oneness. We are interconnected and everything we do affects other people and creation. When we start to understand this we change the way we live. We are all interdependent which means we all, every person, have something to give and something to receive, we need each other. Jesus drew in those who felt themselves independent and encouraged them to give away

their security, and he drew in those who felt themselves dependant and opened up new pathways of purpose and meaning. We are one with each other, one with creation and one in God. It is the understanding of oneness that completes the interconnectedness and the understanding of interdependence. We cannot live to the fullness of our humanity in isolation.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is exploring this understanding and his vision that through the message of Jesus divisions are healed. He recognises that in the past the followers of Jesus once saw themselves as us and them, Jews and gentiles, but in oneness those divisions are removed.

Whilst we, like Paul, have heard and understood this, putting it into practice is much harder. Oneness is the truth, but we struggle to live that reality. We follow the Jesus Way and yet this too can tempt us to see ourselves as different from others, when Jesus points to oneness and unity.

We are surrounded by images that divide, encouraged to see our homes as our castles and then drawn into defending them. John Donne said 'no man is an island', and yet how often do we behave as if we are living on an island which we have to defend against invaders. We have heard the rhetoric in the recent election, so how do we live a different reality?

I recently came across a new picture book by Oliver Jeffers entitled 'What we'll build'. The 'we' is a father and daughter, a parent and child but what if we read this as God and us, what might it teach us.

Listen to the Story – [What we'll build by Oliver Jeffers.](#)

It is a story that recognises the importance of love and storing love, of forgiveness and opening new doors, of times of anxiety and of peace and calm. It is a story of trust and togetherness and that is the message of Jesus. It is a story that recognises the brokenness in the world and suggests we have a part to play in restoring the world through building better bonds and also challenging the production of things that don't work.

In the URC Prayer handbook, Ian Fosten's prayer for today talks of God's intentional love in creation and how humanity has taken it and broken it – boasting of our divisiveness and brandishing labels. It notes how growth in the Spirit leads to an end to childish squabbling and a move towards a place where living in the reality of healing, forgiveness and restoration all labels fall away and we truly understand oneness.

Paul was urging the church in Ephesus to embrace oneness and we too need to embrace the reality of oneness in our living. As church, where are we storing love, how are we building relationships with others and how are we challenging the structures that are broken? As church, do we provide a quiet centre of love, the oneness of God, a place of stored love, or are we too busy in our doing to offer the peace so longed for by so many people?

As we walk the Jesus way we need to keep the doors open and build bridges, always reaching out and welcoming in to the peace which is God.