

Our Suffering God

During “normal times” (remember those?) at this stage in Lent we begin to focus on Passiontide, with Palm Sunday, now only a few days away, starting off Holy Week, culminating in the Last Supper, Jesus’ agony in the Garden, his arrest, crooked trial and crucifixion. Only after what we’ve walked the way of the Cross to Good Friday and a quiet reflective day on Holy Saturday, do we dare to hope. The readings at the Easter Vigil act like a prolonged introduction to Easter Day, reflecting on God’s great acts of salvation in the Old Testament. Only then do we rejoice with our celebration of THE most important day in the Churches year.

So how will it feel this year when it will not be possible to meet on Easter Day? Very odd, I argue, but I think it is important that we all bear in mind that EVERY Sunday is a celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection, so that, as soon as we are permitted we will start celebrating this world changing event, every Sunday?

At the moment I’m not thinking much about Easter, as we seem to be in a different place at the moment. Thinking about Jesus’ Passion feels more appropriate to me right now and I will be posting material to help us all with that.

But Christians are supposed to be people of hope, even when circumstances don’t look that great. We have hope in the Risen Christ whose touch brings life and healing to us all. Doubtless there are many who may be saying something like “if God is so great, why is this happening to us?”, as people have always said during hard and painful times...the same sort of questions were asked about the Holocaust, the deaths of a whole school full of children in Aberfan, 9/11, wars, famines, human cruelty, various tsunamis and earthquakes – the list is pretty endless.

This Pandemic, along with all the other terrible events, are not the action of a capricious or vengeful God. We are not being punished for anything. God is not like that. If he were, I for one would want nothing to do with him! I certainly wouldn’t be doing this job! But another question creeps in here and that is “where is God in all this?”

Where is God in all this?...I would argue, right in the middle of it all, suffering with and alongside the sick, the dying and their grieving families. He is sharing our pain. But He is also elsewhere....among people who are stepping up to help their neighbours, in the courage and compassion of our health workers, among numerous acts of kindness and love, drivers, corner shop staff, giving wisdom to those who are making hard decisions at this time and in the skill and determination of those seeking a vaccine. And those who can do nothing but pray.

A young man many years ago said this to me “When terrible things happen to people, I don’t believe God is angry with them. I believe he cries with them”. This is certainly one way of putting it, and one which reminds us of the depth of pain and suffering at the very heart of God, because of his great love for the whole world, not just humanity.

I have found a wonderful poem, which sums this up beautifully, rather than quote just part of it, I will print it all, in its entirety in my next post.

In Christ’s love, Alice