

Easter 4A 03052020S

The last period of time has been rather challenging for so many people. For many of us, there has been limited contact with people, as a matter of safety- for them and for us. Yet life has continued on and some of us have found plenty of things to keep us busy.

So far we have celebrated Easter in the strangest of ways, not at church but in our homes. We have also had an amazing experience of Anzac Day when people gathered at their front gates with candles in hand to stop, give thanks and remember. And next Sunday, 10th May will be Mother's Day and many of us will be unable to see our Mothers and spend time with them. For others of us, we will be unable to see our children or grandchildren and so another strange occasion in the midst of a lockdown.

I think in some ways we have more of an understanding of what it might have been like for the early church. Some were locked away, afraid of what may happen to them. Yet others had started a pattern of worship, spending time together over meals, and even more. The reading from Acts gives us a lovely glimpse of the early church.

Many of them were new to faith in Jesus, not having experienced him in their lives prior to the cross. They were the new generation of Christians, not that they were known by that name at that time. That term was first used in Acts 11- followers of Christ. Perhaps there was a sense of delight and eagerness in their faith that they wanted to know more and more and more.

What we do know from the reading is that they gathered regularly together to worship God. That they shared meals together and that they gave food, clothing and money to those in need. I don't know about you but that is how I would love for the church to be today and I think in some ways it is.

Yet when we read the gospel reading for today we have a very different image to contend with. That of the shepherd being the gate for the sheep.

I love the images of the sheep knowing the voice of the shepherd and the shepherd knowing each one of the sheep. It is a very reassuring image- even if most of us have never been on a farm with sheep.



During my study leave I have spent time learning about the Scriptures for Hind people as so many people I work and connect with are Hindu. I was struck by a cartoon I was watching with one of the gods who, as a child, was supposed to hold up a mountain with his little finger so that the people of the village could be safe from the storm that was raging outside. It was a lovely story and I imagine it brings comfort to many people. Yet as I watched it I knew that the God I believe in is one God, not many. Although I have enjoyed learning and reading some of the Hindu texts, just as I have when I have read some of the Quran, I know that these scriptures are not the voice of the God I know and follow.

There is a sense of really knowing who we follow. Of knowing that the voice we listen to is the voice of God through Jesus. In knowing this, the early church shared what they had experienced and what they knew with others- and many others were saved and joined them and they grew in number.

I invite you sit very still for a minute or so. As you breathe in and out I want you to listen. What can you hear?

I can hear a clock ticking in the background, and different birds singing. I can hear children and families walking past on their way to the park at the end of my street. I can here the workers digging up the road as they prepare for it to be fixed again. Occasionally I can hear a tuck go past. But if I listen very carefully, I can hear my own thoughts. I invite you to think about God- and to simply breathe in and breathe out.

God is in your breathe, the very air you breath is the same as the air I breathe. God is with you, just as God is with me.

And wherever we go and whatever we do God is with us. Read the words of Psalm 23, and as you do, breathe in and out slowly.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

THIS is the God who we follow- the one who is the gate, the one who leads us and cares for us and guides us.

May you find comfort in this love.

May you find an energy in the strength of this love, and in doing so, may you share God's love in your own life as you worship God, eat with others and enjoy being the people of God- separate for now, but always together.

