

Cast all your cares

One of the things I do to relax is play games on computers. Recently I was able to play a particular game which involved going to different 'planets' and solar systems to find stars as part of a quest. At the end of the game there is a beautiful little story of how we are all made from the essence of stars.

I have spent some time thinking about that very concept, as one of the children's story books I have used for Play group has a similar theme. On one level we do have the same chemical elements making up our bodies, with a lot of water and other aspects as well. Yet on another level there is so much more to life than just the physical makeup.

If I am asked what I believe and why I believe it I have a range of ways of responding- depending on the person and the context. For some people want 'evidence' of God's existence. Some settle for some of the stories of how I have experienced God in my life, others are more intrigued why people who are intelligent and well educated could possibly believe in God and others still want a scriptural accounting of what I believe.

My response is usually, firstly, about what I feel. I feel the presence of God with me all the time- and I am fortunate in that I always have. There are too many things in life that have happened to me or around me that cannot be explained by co-incidence. And there is so much teaching of the scriptures and the church and other people over the years to help me even in those occasional moments of doubt.

Over the last few weeks since we celebrated Easter the bible readings tell us about people who weren't sure about whether to believe or not. They have reminded us of the incredible teachings of Jesus Christ. And they have reminded us that sometimes we will be persecuted for our faith but to hold to that which we hope. Hold on to the faith in God through Jesus Christ. And they have reminded us that we do need to be respectful and gentle with people of other faiths.

Today we hear a reminder of those things from the first letter of Peter and in the gospel of John we have heard Jesus praying for himself and for his disciples- that they might be one.

I have shared this before but I think it is a timely reminder for us now. Most of you may have heard of the Wesley brothers- John and Charles. Charles was well known for writing hymns and we do sing some of them from time to time. However John was a deep thinker who wrote a lot of theology. And one of the legacies from his writing is a way of helping us make decisions- and helping us perhaps explain to people why we believe in God.

Wesley talked about the basis of faith being the scriptures- for this is where we hear other stories of faith and we can hear God speak through them. However he also talked about understanding scripture in the light of church tradition. In some ways this was to prevent some of the misinterpretations which could be fathomed at particular times in history. He also talked about faith as being more than ideas. It needed to be based on our personal and communal experience. But all of these things needed to make sense. So he talked about reason.

This is called the Wesleyan quadrilateral but in essence, what does the scripture say? How have I experienced that? What does the church say? Does that make sense?

When the world is faced with some of the horrors we have experienced since 911 that are so public and so global we need to stop and think. We currently live in the midst of a pandemic which has changed the world that we know. I heard a noise the other day and looked up and it was a

plane. I realised I haven't seen or heard any for a while. Helicopters, yes, but not planes. The traffic sounds are becoming louder again and the shops are opening up. Yet there are still acts of bad behaviour happening every day, some that we know and others that we don't. Covid 19 may not kill all of humanity but the way we act towards each other and creation may do so. How can we deal with this part of humanity where people do not respect other people? How do we cope when our world has changed so much? Where is God in the midst of this?

The **scriptures** we have heard today tell us that God is with people in the midst of suffering. The scriptures tell us we need to draw together as one. The scripture tells us that Jesus wants us to be people of love and to love one another as he has loved us.

Tradition tells us we need to act in love- and we need to try and forgive and care for others even when they hurt us.

Experience tells us that fighting violence with violence only begets violence. We see that in the tit for tat between rival gangs. Experience also tells us that when we feed and clothe our enemies, when we act with compassion to another, it is much harder for them to hate us and harm us.

And **reason** says that we are made in the image of God and we are better than that. We are better than animals fighting each other to gain territory. We are better than a rogue elephant coming and destroying everything around. We are better than that.

On Sunday 31st May we celebrate Pentecost. We are reminded that God has never left us alone and has always been with us. Irrespective of our suffering or our struggles God is with us. Jesus is glorified as we go about sharing our faith in the way we live our lives, what we say and how we treat others. God wants to take our concerns and our anxieties, all the things which worry us, and Jesus prayed that we would be protected. We need to trust what has been said and know that prayers support us in the strangest of times.

Now we have the very simple task of going and loving God and loving others just as Jesus commanded and in doing so, cast all your cares on him for he cares for you.

