

Easter 6 May 9th 2021 Acts 10. 44-48 and John 15: 9-17

Signs of light and love - how do we embody God's love?

Have you seen pictures of Stonehenge or even visited, when light streams through tall rocks on the horizon? We stopped at StoneHenge a couple of weeks ago. It's a remarkable, mysterious place, whose origins remain largely unexplained. How did humans 3000 years ago or even further back in history, transport tonnes of rock across the country? How and why did they arrange the rocks in line with the winter/summer solstice? StoneHenge is an awe inspiring sacred place, yet leaves us with many unexplained and unanswered questions...

Pictures of Stonehenge also remind me of the light shining through the open tomb at Easter. When have you experienced Easter light streaming into your life?

This year Spring seemed more vivid following an intense winter lock down. And as restrictions lift, are we beginning to feel more 'hopeful' as our lives open up?

Who could have known 2 Easters ago that an invisible virus could change our lives so dramatically. From the way we travel, work, shop, worship, educate and socialise?

Although treatments and vaccines have progressed remarkably, Covid 19 remains a mystery. We don't fully understand the way it is transmitted or mutates. Yet we remain hopeful that humanity will find a way to live fully again across the world. If we lived in India would we be feeling as hopeful?

From this perspective how do we respond to pictures in the news of places opening up the UK alongside pictures of suffering in India where patients and their loved ones are turned away from hospitals; too overwhelmed to offer treatment?

How in 2021 do we live in a world where resources are so unfairly distributed it costs thousands of lives?

Today's short reading from Acts reminds us God the Holy Spirit is shared out for everyone and that God shows no partiality between people. Although a short reading, it's a pivotal point in the life of the early Church. And this is followed by our Gospel in John which describes the quality of God's love. How do we embody and live out God's love? How do these passages help us to reflect and embody God's love for our world today?

In Acts, Peter's sermon is cut short by the Holy Spirit. The Gentiles were filled with the Holy Spirit - the same Holy Spirit. In the cultural context of the time it would have been unheard of Gentiles and Jews to mix- they considered one another's rituals unclean. Yet God broke down the barriers between them and revealed their shared humanity.

How does it speak to our context now? Today's readings are a poignant reminder God's love isn't limited to some people or groups, that there isn't a precondition to God's love and that all human life is precious and honoured to God. But the question remains how we model our human resources and scientific achievements in this way too?

Jesus goes on to describe what sharing love looks like in the Gospel. At risk of the Holy Spirit interrupting this sermon, I won't dwell on the Gospel too much. It raises all sorts of issues about the nature of God's love which is balanced, liberating and reciprocal. It might help us or confuse us that this is still part of Jesus' farewell message to his friends, prompting questions about the language of love and joy, in a passage which is actually about loss and lament.

Or does that resonate with our mixed feelings today as we look forward to life feeling more normal in the UK alongside the sadness we hold for India in the midst of ongoing loss and suffering?

When we are surrounded by so much inequality in the world around us, when our hope is unsettled by another person's despair, how do we seek God's abiding and enduring love?

I'd like to finish with a reflection that I keep returning to this Easter.

It's written by Richard Carter. Formerly a monk who lived on the remote Solomon islands, he returned to Inner City ministry as a Priest at St Martins in the fields. It is from his recent book 'The City is my monastery' which is full of beautiful yet sometimes very challenging and sobering reflections.

I've found myself reading it over again this Easter Season. As Spring turns to summer, the Easter season moves towards Pentecost, it sparked hope following such a difficult winter for so many. May these words help us abide in God's love.

Lets keep a few moments of quiet to be still. Let us become aware of the Holy Spirit within us and between us; poured out for everyone:

Here in stillness

Here as you breathe in deeply

Let the presence of God unknot you

And fill your longing

Like the beauty of rain quenching a parched land

Like the sunlight's warming brightness after the dampness of the shadow

Like the tenderness of love's touch after the brittleness of loneliness

Like a flower opening imperceptibly

Like a shower of rain washing away caked dust

Like the discovery of beauty when you thought it had gone away

Like the moon reflecting a luminous light

Like seeing the stars again when you thought they no longer shone

Feel again the truth of God's life flowing in and out
Untangling you from the inside out
Like love unseen, unheard, undeserved, expanding your heart
Broadening your world
Christ rising in you
The tomb becoming the place of resurrection. AMEN