

Sunday 7th June : 'To Believe or what to Believe, that is the Question'

Thank you for joining me here at St. Swithun's on Trinity Sunday, which is the Sunday after Pentecost when we traditionally look at the character of God and what God has revealed about Himself. There is a story told about a mother watching her child drawing a big splotch of orange in the middle of the paper and when the mother asked what are you drawing? "I am drawing a picture of God" The mother said "Yes but nobody knows what God looks like" To which the child replied - "but they will know when they see my picture!"

Well, we don't know what God is like, why should we believe in a God at all? Today we are going to think about the character of God and who God might be. Why is this an important question? It is important because whether we believe or don't believe affects the way in which we live. It is fundamental to our understanding of the world and is crucial to the way in which we live.

If there is a God or if there is not a God - what is this God like? The reason I believe in God is a number of multiple strands. It seems to be part of what it is to be human to be spiritual, to believe in love, to believe in freedom. All cultures seem to have an understanding and belief not just in the physical and material but in the spiritual side of life, but they name it differently. Societies have different ways of worship and culture. Different ways of marking the passing from this world. Animism, Spiritualism, Polytheism, Pantheism, Monotheism, Communism, humanism, materialism, atheism. All of these different ways are saying, we have some understanding of what it is to be human and that is why whether we believe or do not believe in God is really quite important.

Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. and so He taught them this prayer. He said when you pray begin like this:

Our Father, Who art in heaven

Just those words themselves describe an important thing. If we believe that God is our Father, that in itself says something to us about His relationship to us. That is what Jesus was saying, treat one another like family, honour Your heavenly Father, and one another like brothers and sisters.

Regardless of race, religion, beauty or brains, colour, class. You are family, human beings together, equal in value. We have one Heavenly Father, there is a brotherhood and sisterhood - in our humanity. There is no place for "White supremacy", for racial segregation, in the Gospel and for those who follow Jesus.

Our Father who are in heaven. It is a higher moral authority, not just doing the things that I want or I feel best, but there is ONE to whom I will one day give account and know that He is in heaven then share what you have. It is our daily bread that we pray for, not mine, but ours that we share.

Our lives are fragile and we must all give account of ourselves. Queen Elizabeth on her coronation was given the Orb. There is an inscription on the cross on the top of the Orb: "Christ is the King of this world and she rules under Him" For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory..... Yours Lord is the Kingdom. God gives us power to live life well. I will live it under You, and thank You that You have given me life.

Yes, it matters what I believe, and what sort of God I believe in.

It is important for us to find our purpose, our place in this world, and discover a power that comes from God.

How can we know that God is like?

I believe God exists because it is universal to all cultures, but also because it is fundamental to the heart and the psyche of what it is to be human.

The Bible says that human beings are made in the image of God. It is a fundamental mistake to turn that upside down and make God in our own image. That is called Idolatry, to create a god for ourselves, or even a god of ourselves, to believe that we are alone in this universe and therefore can live just as we please.

In our society today, we need to grasp what Jesus declared: "His is the power and the glory". For too many people it has become - 'mine is the power, mine is the glory, mine is the kingdom...'

You may say, "I find it difficult to believe in God, I certainly don't believe in a God who has fits of rage, irrational miracles and prejudices." Well, I don't believe in a God that like either, I believe in a God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

There is so much that I don't know....How a mobile phone works, how this computer in front of me works, how it is transmitting this to you. I do not know how the universe works, and although science can tell us so very much, it has its limits. There are trillions of stars and atoms in the world and yet there is more.....

Some scientists would say that at least 25 percent of our universe is called "dark matter" estimated at around 70 percent of the universe - matter that cannot be detected or known to science today. There is so much that we do not know and therefore what can I know about God? I don't want to make Him up in my own image, what can I know? I can know what He has revealed to us. We believe that the heart and kindness of God has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

I cannot pick my own religion as a lucky dip, choosing anything out there on offer. Is there any that would give me hope other than just a best guess or follow a human leader?

Well I would contend that Jesus is unique. Christ is the One who came from God. In the encounter of Christ with Nicodemus in John chapter 3, Jesus says He has come from God. God sent His only Son into the world so that the world might believe and be saved. God did not send His Son into the world to bring condemnation but to save and rescue. That is how Jesus put it. Jesus spoke to His disciples on numerous occasions when He said to them in John chapter 5:18 "I and the Father are one". It was for this that the people picked up stones to stone Him because of His blasphemy. John writes at the beginning of his gospel saying that Jesus came down from heaven and made God known.

Paul in Colossians 15 writes that Christ is the image of the invisible God. What a beautiful picture! Some others have described Jesus as 'the human face of God' and John recorded Jesus' last words to His disciples in John chapter 14, that great passage where Jesus says "I am going to my Father's house and in my Father's house there are many rooms." His friend Thomas said to him "we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" Jesus says to Thomas "I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through me." Philip says well Jesus that it all very well but show us the Father, show us what God is like! Jesus says to him, Philip, have I not been with you all this time and do you not realise that I am the Father are one, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father....

If you want to know what God is like then take a good look at Jesus.

If I was to say that to you, you would think I was crazy and you would be absolutely right. Either I would be crazy or manipulative and therefore an evil man. That is what C.S. Lewis the writer of the Chronicles of Narnia wrote. He put it this way, "Jesus was either mad, bad or God!" Either he was deluded, thinking himself to be God, or deliberately misleading people, a great con man fooling everyone, or Jesus was so much more. Look at Jesus' character, words, deeds, death and resurrection. No-one else in all of history has ever been spoken of in this way, neither has anyone risen from the dead like this. He is utterly unique and worthy of listening to.