

Easter 3 Chapelle Palluau 15/4/18

Acts 3 12-19; Lk 24 36b-48

What sort of God do we believe in? How much do we really know about Him? And how is the Christian God different from the God worshipped by those of other faiths? These are basic questions, yet we do not often ask them of ourselves, perhaps because they are so challenging.

There is a real sense in which, because God is so far beyond our ability to understand or describe, we create Him according to our own needs. So primitive peoples would turn to Him to ensure their food supply and protection from enemies and offer sacrifices to gain His good will and support. In our modern world we can create a God who exists to ensure that bad things don't happen to nice people, like us, or the God who is there to call upon in need but can be ignored when things are going well. The philosopher Simone Weil understood this when she wrote 'We have to empty God of His divinity in order to love Him.' The God we worship as Christians is unique because He loves us and, to continue Weil's thought, 'He emptied Himself of His divinity by becoming man and then of His humanity by becoming a corpse.'

Today's readings remind us that God's nature and ways of doing things are different from what we think. That is why we live so often in fear and doubt. In our gospel reading Jesus appears to the disciples who have just been told how He appeared to two of their number on the road to Emmaus and that He had also appeared to Simon. But they don't know what is going on, what to believe or what it all means. Now Jesus appears to them and speaks 'Peace.' But they don't receive it. Terror and doubt prevail and lest we judge them harshly, let us remember how we often behave when faced with things we cannot understand. He must be a ghost, and even when He shows them His wounds they still 'wonder and disbelieve' in spite of their joy. So Jesus eats the fish – His risen body, and we could spend a long time thinking about its nature, - is capable of eating, just like ours. So they need to be taught more about God and the nature of His love.

Their eyes and their hearts need to be opened to the real meaning of the Scriptures and then burn within them as they understand more fully the extent

and the nature of God's love and purpose in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is, as Saint John, states most clearly, all about love. God is love and in love He sends His Son, not to condemn the world but to offer forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

But what are they to believe? Jesus by His wounds and in His risen presence is the living proof that God, in His love, chooses to be vulnerable in Jesus. He not only empties Himself of His glory to be born as a baby in Bethlehem, as we remember at Christmas, living our human life as we do, yet without sin – falling short of God's standards of loving Him with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves – but also allows Himself to be mocked tortured and brutally put to death – as we remember on Good Friday. What sort of God is this? A victim and a loser, a useless might have been who promised much and, when the chips were down, delivered nothing – as the disciples on the road to Emmaus told Jesus to His face. We don't understand so much but God's true nature is revealed in the Risen Christ. Nothing, not even the weight of our sin or the power of death can overcome God's love in Jesus Christ. This we remember and rejoice in at Easter. God, as Archbishop Michael Ramsey once said, 'is Christlike and in Him there is no unChristlikeness at all.'

But we need to hold all these things together, not just at one season, but each day of our life's journey. Jesus in saint John appears to Thomas and shows him His wounds and when Thomas responds in belief – my Lord and my God tells him that he is blessed because he has seen but that those who believe without seeing are more so. We, by the grace of God, are part of their number.

So what are we to take from today's Scripture readings into the rest of our worship this morning and out into the world when we leave church? Let us allow Jesus to meet with us and speak His peace to us. We too, all of us, have our fears and our doubts. There is much in life which threatens us, much we cannot explain, or cope with in our own strength, but Jesus is risen from the dead. Therefore we have hope in the face of the worst the world can throw at us and we can have peace, knowing that nothing can ever separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ.

And we do not need to be theologians, only believers, sometimes praying, like the centurion, 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief.' Last Sunday I took a service in one of my home churches in England. At the end the organist stood up to thank members of the congregation for their love and support during that week. On the night of Good Friday to Easter Saturday his wife had suddenly died in bed beside him. What a shock, and what grief. His story moved me to tears but he ended by saying that he couldn't understand how people could cope without faith in the Risen Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit renew us in our faith today and reveal to us the Risen Christ and all He wills to teach us about the God who loves us and to show His love and victory to all we meet. Amen