

Sermon preached by Fr Jeremy at All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead on the 28th April, 2019

Easter 2

John 20.19-31

What type of God does Thomas see when he says, 'My Lord and my God?'

Jesus' followers are afraid, they are to share his mission into a hostile World. Their commission is to be agents of forgiveness and reconciliation into a world that rejects them. It is a remarkable story because they are a fragmented group made up of characters like Judas who has rejected Jesus, Peter who has denied knowing Jesus and Thomas who will not believe unless he sees for himself the Risen Lord. All of the disciples have in some way misunderstood Jesus. Thomas though has shown bravery in returning to Bethany even if it means certain death to support Jesus. This is followed by his question in John 14 that asks how will we know the way? Which enables Jesus to respond, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' In our passage this morning Thomas is the person who sees Jesus as his friend and his God.

Perhaps the clue is that Jesus will be a servant, and in powerlessness will challenge people to respond in love. The Holy Spirit will empower the early believers and us to be people that will bring light, people who will love God with all their strength, all their mind and all their heart and their neighbour as themselves. They will seek to follow the Lord's prayer to bring thy Kingdom here on earth as in heaven.

This week we are thinking about the challenge that Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain has set the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths in the light of the attacks made on Pittsburgh, Christchurch, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. Jonathan, Imam Abid Hashmi and myself are going to speak in each other's place of worship. Jonathan's idea is to spread a message of peace and solidarity following the atrocities. The idea is to show that we can practice our religions and live in harmony with one another as well as seek the common good for our communities.

A couple of years ago I was sharing an assembly at Altwood school that looked at the life of Jo Cox a politician that spoke up for the lonely, the poor, the homeless, mental health issues and Syrian child refugees. She felt that there was more that brought us together in community than divides us. In Maidenhead particularly in the Church of England Schools of Boyne Hill, All Saints and Atwood I have witnessed evidence of this cohesion.

Boyne Hill have Multi-Faith assemblies where they invite Faith leaders to speak on an issue such as good neighbours, trust and compassion. In the week leading to the attacks in Christchurch I shared an assembly with a Muslim woman who clearly laid out what someone from the Islamic faith should understand by being compassionate. Imam Hashmi of Maidenhead Mosque went on to explain to me three words that mean compassion, *Muhabah*, *Hub* and *Rahma* which are crucial in our understanding. The third word reflects the understanding at the beginning of the Koran that God is compassionate and merciful.

The Oxford Diocese desires that congregations be contemplative, compassionate and courageous. At Boyn Hill school we thought about compassion to a homeless person. Would we walk by thinking the problem is too big, would we blame the person because they have brought trouble upon themselves, would we blame the government, or would we come alongside the person and show empathy or compassion? We looked at Gandhi walking in the shoes of another and we reflected upon Harper Lee's 'To kill a Mockingbird' and Atticus teaching his children ' You never know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it'. In Christchurch, children as young as 3 years of age perished, and refugees from Syria looking for a better life in the wonderful culture of New Zealand perished. What would it feel like to have walked in the shoes of those running from a war torn country to find a better life for themselves and their children?

Continuing with the education theme All Saints school has for the last 3 years hosted a community day. The school with over 40 different nationalities represented offer food from different continents and highlight the value of hospitality. At one service at All Saints Church we reflected with the children on the faith communities offering hospitality. The Sikh community offering welcome and food to every guest at the Gurdwara, the Muslim community shortly entering Ramadan where from early morning until late evening they will deny themselves food to come closer to God, to help the general fund of care and offer 'Fitrana' – a gift to another person in thanksgiving to God's blessing upon them. The Jewish community continues to work with Christians in Maidenhead to address the Homeless issue and to offer food through the 'Food Share' scheme.

Jesus and the Jewish faith ask's, that we love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and our neighbour as ourselves. From a sermon given by Imam Monawar Hussain at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford in October last year we discovered the following from Muhammad 'That you serve food and give salutation of peace to the one you know and the one whom you do not know.' He also remarked 'The best of people are those that bring the most benefit to the rest of humankind'. In answer to the question 'What are the most excellent actions?' 'To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrowful and to remove the suffering from the injured.'

Jesus taught us the Lord's prayer Thy Kingdom Come on Earth as it is in Heaven'. Let us pray for a world where all try to bring Kingdom qualities to this world in which we live. In our gospel this morning Thomas greeted His Lord and His God, the one who would say 'Peace be with you' a peace brought about by sacrificial love, a servant love that would transform the world. The Holy Spirit would be the source that transformed Jesus' fearful and divided early believers and will transform us.