



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

‘The Love of God and the Gift of Life’

Readings:

Psalm 121;

Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5,13-17;

John 3:1-17

Second Sunday of Lent

8 March 2020

Shortly after the sermon in most of our churches we will stand and say the creed together.

“We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty
maker of heaven and earth..”

The words echo around our building and then we move on to the next part of our service; half an hour or so later we will leave for our homes and the lives that we lead, with all their complexity and business. During the week we may well hear news of global incidents, perhaps acts of terror, perhaps some disaster caused by climate change. In what way do the statements we make about God in church relate to the way we understand the world about us and how we live?

The Bible readings today remind us of the sheer loving abundance and gift of God. From God’s relational commitment and promise to Abraham to the extravagant costly love of God expressed by Jesus in response to a secret question by Nicodemus.

God is a relational God. In relation between the person of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit but also shown in the way God relates to his creation as well as to us as part of his creation. If God is Almighty and creator he is complete in and of himself. The very act of creating and bringing the universe, the earth and us into being was costly. God takes delight in the whole of his creation; he is active in sustaining and caring for all he has made. The psalm for to-day reminds us of God as the creator who is also a helper, keeper and protector of his people. God is a constant presence in such routine things as our daily coming and goings.

Our Gospel reading today contains one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16

Christians often understand the word world as meaning sinful, corrupt humanity. The actual word that John uses literally means ‘something ordered’ and so can be used to mean the world, the universe, worldly affairs or indeed humanity. Ancient Greek philosophy understood a dualism between the physical and the spiritual and western culture has tended to do the same. This impacts how we as Christians think about ourselves and our faith. So we have tended to see the world and the physical reality of humanity as evil and something to be left behind while the spiritual life is the thing that is significant and what is important is where we are heading, shaped by some of our understandings of eternal life and heaven.

In John 3: 16 where we come across this word ‘world’ we see something that shatters this understanding of world as bad and spirit as good. We read “For God so loved the world...”. John declares God’s amazing overwhelming extravagant love for the breadth of humanity. A love that is expressed by God’s incredible costly sacrificial love in the gift of Jesus who identifies with our fallen humanity and through his self-giving love dies a death on the cross lifting humanity to be seated with him. In case we are in any doubt, John goes on to say that God’s purpose in Jesus was not condemnation.

At the start of John's gospel we read the familiar words "In the beginning was the word .." which goes on to say "what has come into being in him was life and that life was the light for all people." Light and Life. These are the gifts given to us in Jesus, now here in this life that we live, in the physical world we live in.

This week in this season of Lent let us ponder again the sheer abundant gift of God to us in Jesus and reflect on how we live here on earth in the light of God's amazing gift of life to us.