

Easter Sunday Evensong

One of the greatest privileges of being a secondary school teacher was working with a tutor group. I was fortunate because the year that I started teaching I was given a Year 7 tutor group. This was their first year in secondary school, and I was their tutor for the next three years, until they were ready to start their studies for GCSE.

In the school where I taught, it was the tutor who taught Citizenship to their tutor group. These were lessons when we discussed such things as how the political system functions, and how to manage household finances. The lessons were designed, as the name suggests, to shape these young people as good citizens, and were an opportunity for me to get to know the children in my tutor group a little better.

During one of our lessons, the opening questions asked the children to consider what they believed to be important in life. As the discussion began, they told me of their ambitions to achieve high paying jobs; to own large houses, fast cars, and all of the latest games they could ever want. And yet very little time had gone by before, as we explored what *really* mattered, the children dropped all their talk of material goods. To all of them, what mattered most was their family and friends. If they could guarantee anything it would be health, love and friendship.

It was in this kind of lesson, more than any other – and I was fortunate in having quite a lot of them – that my own faith grew. Those were the times that I could see so clearly that in each of those young people there was something that told them categorically what was right and what was wrong; what mattered most, and what was less important.

While I fully understand that others will see things differently, for me, that sense in which human beings are drawn towards a path that recognises the value of the other and is prepared to give of themselves even when there is no obvious gain for themselves is a sign that we were, indeed, made in the image of God. That we were made by a God who loves us intimately, and longs for us to share that love with others.

In this evening's gospel reading there is a moment of recognition for Mary. She is distraught. Not only has Jesus been crucified – the person who showed love and compassion, and who she believed in and followed. But when she went to find his body, she discovered that it wasn't there. Even her ability to pay her respects, to tend to his crucified body, had been cruelly snatched from her.

In her distress she meets first two angels, and then the risen Jesus. She does not recognise him at first, but believes him to be a gardener. And then he speaks. One word. Mary. Her name. He recognises her, and she recognises him in return.

As we approach the end of Easter day, this day of great joy and celebration, I want to invite you to take some time in the coming days and weeks to consider where it is that you can recognise God's presence. What are those moments that help you to trust more fully in God's love?

Some of you may have experienced God's presence in dramatic ways like St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Or perhaps you find it quite hard to articulate what it is that gives a conviction that this story of Jesus really might have something to say to us.

The words that Mary utters after her encounter are these: "I have seen the Lord." When, I wonder, do you think that you might have seen the Lord? Through the kindness of others; through unexpected kindness; through a particular supernatural encounter.

And as you ponder this, I wonder whether you might also start to think about how you would tell others. Mary's first action is to tell the disciples about her experience. This is an exciting time for me as I begin my ministry among you. If you have the time over the coming weeks, I would love to hear your own stories about where you have seen God at work so that we can grow together as disciples of Christ.

Amen