

Dear Friends,

This Sunday is Advent Sunday when we mark the start of our preparations for Christmas. This year we won't be in church on Sunday and we know it will all be very different. The details haven't been spelt out to us yet though they may well have been by the time you read this.

In this week's Old Testament reading, Isaiah 64:1-9, the people of Israel were in despair. Isaiah speaks up for his people and asks where is God and why won't he do anything about their situation? The Israelites were living in exile. Their country had been invaded and they had been carted off to a foreign land. They had been taken to Babylon far away from the promised land they had been given by God. It seemed to the people of Israel that God himself had deserted them.

They could look back on the past when it was all so very different. God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, he had guided them through the wilderness, he had given them the promised land, a fertile land where they had grown rich. They could look back on all the things that God had done for them in the past, but where was he now, where was he in their time of great need. The people of Israel demand to know "Where is God?"

There are plenty of people today who echo that same question "Where is God?" Whenever disaster strikes it isn't surprising that questions are asked about God. Where is God? What sort of God would allow these things to happen?

It isn't easy to believe in God today. It isn't easy to believe in God for all sorts of reasons. The questions that are posed by major incidents like this pandemic aren't easy for us to cope with. We ask these questions ourselves when we see innocent people suffering deeply. We know that there aren't any easy answers to these questions. We may be able to continue to believe in God, but we know there are others who can't.

It isn't easy to believe in God today. We sometimes wish, like Isaiah, that God would intervene decisively and with power. We sometimes wish he would intervene in such a way that he would prove us right and all the cynics wrong. Who knows what might happen in the future? One thing Jesus tells us very clearly is that we don't know what will happen or when - God will act in his own time.

We are called to be watchful, to be vigilant. But in the meantime we can point to a God who has intervened decisively in the world. At this Advent time we remember that God came to live among us in Jesus. We can point to a God of great and unlimited power who came to us as a small child. The truth we celebrate at this season is the love of God shown to us in Jesus. The God we believe in is a God of power, but he is also a God of love who loves us so much that he sent his own son to live among us.

With best wishes,

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