

Fear is a strange thing. It creeps up on us often when we least expect it. Sometimes our fears are life long – ask anyone like myself who has a fear of spiders! But often fears are short lived, or contextual.

In the Harry Potter series there is a creature called a Boggart which lives in dark places, in cupboards and under stairs and is a shape shifter. No one knows what a Boggart looks like because when it is let out it assumes the shape of the thing which the person most fears. I wonder what shape a Boggart would take if we stood in front of it?

As I spent some time in prayer and reflection this week I could relate to the prophets of old who feared where God was leading them. As we prepare to re-open churches for private prayer, and God willing, public worship in the coming weeks – what will this look like? The Pandemic continues, and yet we move forward - as we prepare our buildings to re-open, cleaning, new systems, risk assessments. In the end there are so many unknowns that it will be only as we inhabit the spaces again that we might be know truly what our thoughts are.

I suspect what we fear in this, may well depend what we hear in this and what we believe. Of course we want our churches to be open, they are important to us, but one of the question I felt challenged to consider this week is what do I fear about them opening, or not opening? Maybe we might each need to ask ourselves the same question. Do I have a purpose, a faith – if the church is open or closed?

In Matthew's Gospel today we hear Jesus continue to explain to the disciples that they must imitate him. In Jesus time to be a disciple was to be student who went and lived with the teacher you were seeking to emulate. Discipleship literally means being a student, but not as we might understand student as a person who turns up once a week or day for a lecture, rather a student is one who commits to living in the same atmosphere and breathing the same air, so that you might not miss any pearls of wisdom or learning that they might offer.

We need to understand this concept of discipleship and even being a student, if we are to get the most out of our readings today – where Jesus is explaining how the disciples are called to live. Disciples as Rowan Williams¹ puts it are those who 'are looking and listening without interruption'.

It is actually an incredibly challenging passage. It is not that we can choose to engage with the bits of God, or the life of Jesus which are comfortable or palatable – but rather that we let God inhabit, and deal within each part of our journey. This is also what we are called to, to inhabit God's journey in the way that we live. That means as hard as it is we need to inhabit the place we are in now with God as uncomfortable as it might be. Even if it is not what we think the Church is, God invites to inhabit and learn.

¹ Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian life By Rowan Williams

As we confront our fears about our current situation, we need to be open to the voices of each other, and be aware of where God is with us in this place. We have a responsibility to keep our ears and eyes open – to be aware of what God is saying to us now as we prepare to return to our buildings. To be listen for how God wants us to inhabit these spaces in new or different ways, not just assume God wants us to return to the status quo.

As Jesus speaks with the disciples he reminds them - whatever we inhabit, whatever we face – we never do it alone. *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” “Do not be afraid” – the hallmark of the Gospel and words we cannot say too frequently in a world so marked by fear. “Do not be afraid” “You are of great value”.*²

Whatever we fear – and there is much fear around us at this time – we need to remember God is with us. We are called to live as people of faith with integrity. And like the disciples that means we inhabit the teachings of Jesus and listen for what action they require from us.

The reality of course is that we don't always see things as others see it. Sometimes when we inhabit a new space, or even the same space with new eyes, we see all sorts of things we didn't notice before.

Matthew Gospel reminds us that as we inhabit a 'new normal', as we encounter our changing world - there will be things to embrace and things to be wary of – but whatever we face we are not alone – and whatever we face we need to do so with integrity and with our eyes open with the eyes of Christ. Amen.

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/06/pentecost-3-a-two-timely-truths/>