

How do we see and understand God?

If we think about the way we view people, particularly people in authority, it often has as much to do with our own competencies and insecurities as it does theirs. This is also the case when we describe and talk about God. So much of how we describe or interpret God to others reflects our perceptions.

Often when I talk to people about how they are going with God I often find that people do not believe that God will forgive them. When you dig, this is often because that person finds it hard to forgive others, or it can be that they find it hard to forgive themselves.

Equally often those who cannot believe God loves them can find it hard to allow others to love them too, or for them to love any one - or to even love themselves.

Often we talk about the importance context of the biblical text; but equally important is the preconceptions we bring to the things we read and pray. If we are not open to hearing something different or experiencing God anew, then we may miss out on the depth of relationship and love God longs to offer.

Now Matthew is no different to us, his recording of the parables has a judgemental feel of the end times. He felt that people had much to lose and very little time to change. In the reading today from Matthew 25, we hear the parable of three servants who are given talents to care for while their master is away. The 3rd servant is fearful and does nothing with the gifts he is given. The servants are entrusted with a huge amount - a talent is roughly equivalent to just over £ 1 million. The land owner goes away for a long period so they are obviously trusted, even if one of them does fear. But I am intrigued that we always focus on the description given by the third servant and not the other two. They are all trusted. The Master affirms the work of the others; and the Masters seems somewhat angry at the third servant's assessment of the Master as someone who cannot be trusted!

Often this parable has been read either as a warning against laziness in light of the landowner's (God's/Christ's) eventual return - there is a place being ready for God but there is equally a warning here about how we picture God. About how we imagine God wants to interact with us. About how we assess God's character interactions with us.¹ Maybe there are questions that also need to be asked about the experiences of injustice and exclusion the third servant has had in life?

I find this a really helpful to consider in light of all we have experienced this year, and as we move towards Advent - a period of the year which has traditionally focused on being prepared and ready for the coming of Christ. Maybe the point of this Kingdom Season is not about what we are doing - but what we are seeing and being - how we think and pray and promote our relationship with God. Maybe it is

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/11/pentecost-24-a-wysiwig/>

a time when we should think about the baggage we place on God, the unrealistic expectations maybe we have of our faith, or even ourselves; as well as the unjust constructs of our society that do not allow us to see God in all God's wonder.

It makes me wonder about the third servant in the story - why did he feel fearful of the landowner? Why was he frightened of the gift he was given and the task he had been set? What life experience meant he could not trust this Lord! It was most likely a very valid reason - so why doesn't the master notice the impact he is having?

It makes me wonder about our relationships with God - what makes us fearful of God - and for some of us, what makes us fearful of the concept of God? What frightens us or limits us from fulfilling the gifts which God has given us?

I wonder what image of God we have, and if that image limits not only our faith - but our ability to respond to God's call. Similarly - how does our image of God enliven us - inspire us - help us to move forward and be all that God has created us to see. How do this help us to live more generously and justly?

So much of what we see - whether with our eyes, or our hearts or even our knowledge informs how we understand ourselves and who God is - and it can often be distorted by other things that are going on around us. I think the challenge of today's reading, as we prepare for Advent is to consider the image of 'God with us' that informs our faith. Maybe for us this year Advent might be a time when we assess our assumptions about God, and dare to see our faith anew - where we are challenged to ask the question 'what needs to change - for me, for this church, for our society'. Often it is only when we step back and take time to recalibrate that we can see what it is that God is saying to us clearly. Amen.