

How do we respond well to chaos and confusion

Sometimes I go to a coffee shop in town to write my sermon - the last time I went I failed to bring my bike lock with me and had to return home. Yesterday I swapped my glasses for my shades and so when I got inside the coffee shop I could barely see anything. I found myself admitting to the waitress 'It's a conspiracy' and then realised we all like to imagine there is a bigger story to explain the events of our lives and not simply our own stupidity! We like a story, better still a plot to thwart our best efforts and to explain away our failures and inadequacies or simply to blame someone or something else. It lets us off the hook, it takes away any guilt - something we all want - to be never found in the clear, being found guilty. Having to taking responsibility for our actions is about being properly grown up, mature. Pilate washed his hands of his responsibilities, the disciples betrayed Jesus in direct contradiction to their assertion that they would go even to death for their leader, the religious leaders themselves blasphemed saying we have no leader but Caesar,

Last Easter was pretty chaotic and confusing for Jasmine and the family - I thought the storyline was Holy Week ending with Easter Day celebrating here in St Aldhelms. This was not to be. Jasmine struggles to breathe when she gets a cold and this became so acute last ~Easter that she required a constant supply of oxygen and hospitalisation. This was complicated enough except that Benjamin was only weeks old and could not be brought anywhere near the infections of the children's hospital. So Kate and I had to meet in the reception for a handover so that Kate could be with Jasmine briefly before taking Benjamin back home and I stayed overnight in the hospital with Jasmine. When your own child's life is on the line it makes you realise how much you trust God and the doctors, or not. And trust God to do what exactly? Does God care about the detail of our lives and is it part of God's plan that some children survive and others don't? These questions swirl about in the heart and mind of the anxious parent. The story line by which we live comes powerfully into play. Last Easter the life of our own child seemed very precarious - there was chaos and confusion.

This Holy Week chaos and confusion have returned - all of us have to wrestle with our own response to terrorism around the world and the sharp rise in xenophobia, anti-immigrant violence, populism and now chemical warfare. Where is God in all this?

The Chemical attack in Syria was more than I could bear to listen to. Where is God? This is not a new question - the psalmist is quoted by Jesus centuries later - My God

My God why have you forsaken me - or the question Why do the wicked prosper - sounds like a familiar sentiment to me?

Philosophies drive our politics and our economics.

What motivates someone from Kent to drive at high speed into commuters on a London bridge?

I saw a sweatshirt near St Nicholas Church in town saying 'No religion' - we all worship something. We all believe in a bigger story to explain life - no religion is like saying I don't believe in believing anything - which is a belief system, or like saying everything is relative - that's an absolute statement in itself. Alistair McGrath said when people stop believing in God they'll believe in anything. God doesn't believe in religion either - it's not sacrifices and fancy ceremonies and long prayers and penance that God cares about - it's about a contrite humble heart and a desire to serve others and worship Him only.

Be confident in scripture for your starting point to understand the world - there is truth and it's non negotiable. However much the latest fad of self-actualisation wants to allow people to declare themselves as belonging to a non-human species - they are human whether or not they like it or acknowledge it. Another truth is that God is love and our purpose is to worship Him and enjoy Him forever - to do so is to love his creation both the familiar and the strange. Jesus modelled painful self sacrificial love that we might realise God's response to the suffering in the world and be so moved by His love for us and compassion for the world that we too might inhabit and the exhibit that same love to others and tell of that overarching story. Pantomimes and fairy tales love to propose that in the end good triumphs over evil but that's because truth has been discerned - a universal truth - that love triumphs over hatred - always - in the end.

Down with metanarrative, no to an overarching story. Your own truth is the only valid storyline. In fact the cross is the truest of storylines - it shocks, it unifies all humanity, it stands against all the insults and spitting and mocking through the ages - the gospel can take it - here in the apparently bad news of the cross is the fabulous news of God's response to a broken world - He responds with love the most powerful force in the universe. Before the world was created God was in the beginning and before the beginning in a loving trinity. The reason for everything is God's love and sometimes that loves is tender and gentle like a hen and sometimes it is tough and refining and scorching and furious, fearful yet compassionate. There are earthquakes in this gospel that remind the reader of the groaning of all creation

and the triumph of good over evil. God is described as a mother bear - how ferocious would she be should her cubs be threatened?

Jesus loves us too much to let us remain in the prisons we create for ourselves, in the destructive habits we insist upon - discipline is a mark a loving parent but it is uncomfortable to conform to the likeness of Christ.

The goodness the holiness the wonder of God's presence is too much for us to endure and like moths we are drawn towards the image in which we are all created and yet repelled by the light, too bright to demanding, to scary. We want the comfort of the presence of God, we don't want the challenge or responsibility of living in this fallen world as Christ would have us live instead of bending ourselves out of shape to conform to the ever changing and fickle prevailing views of society.

Love God and do as you please - Augustine

Set your heart on God and all your operations and intentions will follow - Ignatius

Work hard to imitate Christ - Thomas a Kempis

Let Christ dwell in your inner being and your outer being will conform more and more to him - Luther, Calvin

How do we respond well to chaos and confusion? In a world that seems increasing unstable and fractured, how do we cope with the volume, the depravity, the cruelty of terrorism chemical attacks starvation natural disasters

Trump changing the election promise of no longer being policeman to the world then Syria chemical attack change of policy

How do we respond well?

### **Responses to Jesus**

Pilate - washing his hands

Pilate's wife - suffered in a dream, perhaps from society ladies

Disciples - unrequited unreturned love, betrayal denial

Religious Leaders - jealousy hatred deceit and scheming

Where is God in all this? **God intervening - what's the response been**

Grumbling over manna, ingratitude of lepers when healed, disobedience in Garden of Eden, crucifixion of messiah, prophets put to death, ten commandments busy making golden calf, promised land - idolatry

## **Storyline**

Return to stardust

Re-incarnation in different form

Resurrection in redeemed and flawless body

Jesus says let yourself be wronged - this approach was loathed by a 20th century philosopher who hated the weakness it seemed to perpetuate.

Take religion out of the equation and you get dangerous alternatives like final solutions super races populism. We must retain the understanding that we are not an island we are not the centre of the universe.

## **Saying the creeds**

Reinforces a higher purpose for our lives, reminds us of belonging to a bigger picture

## **Spreading fake news**

Long View BBC Radio - William of Monmouth, Mousehold Heath, spreading lie about murder of boy by the Jews and raising him to sainthood - prevailed for centuries

Social Media perpetuates propagates bad news, corrections don't get same level of hearing

Alternative truth.

Britain First has more facebook followers than all three other main political parties combined - they perpetuate evidence by repeatedly using the same isolated incidents

## **Jesus philosophy - what was it?**

To do the will of my Father, the tough love required to respond well to appalling atrocities, ingratitude, lies, deception - Jesus was clear about his mission and trusted his Father sufficiently to see it through come what may

Despite pressure from Satan, Pilate, religious authorities, family - Jesus heart and head were set upon the mission the kingdom of God even though it cost him his life.

Jesus wept for his friend, was indignant about exclusivity and hypocrisy corruption and privilege. Jesus destabilised the security of the status quo he was dangerous upsetting those who had a vested interest in preserving the political and societal structures as they were.

Man does not live by bread alone but the very word of God

Love your neighbour and your enemy

Jesus was not about to do a u-turn - he upset many by embodying the truth, the real story of history itself - the love of God for his creation

The Westminster attack has brought an encouraging refusal to give in to extremism - there has been a unifying force amongst Abrahamic faiths and families and friends of victims.

### **How do we respond to Holy Week and other atrocities**

Set your minds on things above, decide your philosophy will be that scripture first then reason and emotion, take up your cross daily and follow Jesus. Then the peace of God will reign in your hearts.....

The story of my life, I am the smile centre of it" I just heard quoted in the coffee shop where I'm writing this - perhaps not - thank God we have reason to shout Hosanna and wave palms - thank God that at the centre of the universe is not an absent minded vicar who forgets glasses and bike locks but a messiah who holds all things, loves all things knows all things and gives up his life that we might be truly free to live as he made us to be and worship and glory in the hope of the resurrection , the compassion of the cross,

When confronted by the chaos and confusion of our world where better to set our hearts and minds than on the suffering servant God who gave his only son not to condemn the world but that the world through him might have everlasting life.