Candlemas

If you were allowed to come and visit us at Church House, as you looked around you would see photos of children, grandchildren, pictures they have painted stuck on around the kitchen, signs and symbols of relationship, whilst these might only be pictures, they are outward signs of an inner relationship. A little like the sacraments of the church outward signs of an invisible grace.

From Genesis to Revelation, we have a picture of God in relationship with people, sharing with them and being involved in their lives, being alongside his creation in its risings and fallings. In Genesis we have a picture of God walking in the garden with people sharing in their lives and taking pleasure in the relationship he has with them. In Revelation that great vision of the reconciliation of people and God chapter 21 v3 we are told that the dwelling place of God is with people.

We are created by God, to be in a close relationship with God, so much so that the Bible tells us we are made in the image of God, may be not physically, but we are made creative, we are made compassionate and we are made to be in relationship, with each other and most importantly with God.

Throughout time people have had an idea that there is something more to life then this and they have had a need to offer themselves and their lives to God. Across the world the nations have cultivated their understanding of God, tuning in to what God maybe and developing their understanding of what it may mean to be his children.

No matter how much we disagree on theology, the expression of faith, the names for God and the manifestations of God there is a commonality in our sense of other, Sense of God and need for a relationship with God.

For the last few weeks our Bible readings have focused on celebrations, and God’s involvement in these, the Baptism of Jesus, the wedding at Canna, today we remember Candlemas when Jesus was presented at the temple. Parents bringing their pride and joy to Church to be held by the priest and blessed.

One of the sorrows of the current situation is the lack of celebration of what it means to be human and the ability to be able to share this with God through the sacramental life of the church.

In this pandemic Weddings can only happen in extreme situations, baptisms are not allowed, and funerals are very restricted.

The pandemic has limited our landmarks and the places and times when we offer our humanity to God through the sacraments of the Church.

I feel that there is something profoundly important about this basic human need to celebrate the landmarks of life with our creator. The need to present, to seek blessing, approval.

This sense of loss and isolation from a place of worship is not a new thing for the people of God. In the psalm 137 we are reminded of the yearning of the exiles to return to Jerusalem from Babylon to “sing the Lord’s songs”. The psalmist reminds us in no uncertain terms about the anger that the people of his time felt, and whilst we hopefully do not agree with the ways in which the psalmist expresses his anger we can empathise with the feelings of loss and pain.

But this current loss and pain, like all things will come to pass, the exiles did return and worshiped once again in Jerusalem. I am sure that the Jerusalem they left was noting like the one they returned to. The city would have changed, and the exiles changed too.

In exile they learnt new things, new ideas and when they returned, they created a new normal, the same songs but sung to a new tune and new instruments in a newly rebuilt city.

Candlemas marks a change in the Church year, today we will take down the crib and pack the nativity figures away for another year, today we turn away from Christmas and start the journey through to Easter, today we start to look towards the new hope of Easter.

The hope of moving from a time of loss to a time of new life, from darkness to light from Sorrow to joy, from exile to being reunited.

And like the exiles I hope that when we return, we will be returning to a new normal, to find new ways to sing the Lord’s song, not to expect that we will be returning to the old, but to welcome the new.

No one can say with any certainty how long we will be exiled from Church, from that sacramental offering of the things in life before God, all that we know for sure, is that while this is painful, it is temporary. This time of exile will end, and we will be able once again to meet and bring before God our celebrations and sing the familiar songs in a new way.