

Good God!
Introduction to the Study Day on 20th July 2019
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Today is a study day and, as such, it is our hope that we will all be learning together. The reason for spending time in workshops is to give us the opportunity to share our thoughts and reflections in smaller groups, and at the plenary to receive some of the wisdom of the day.

I don't therefore, intend to speak for very long and I don't expect to say anything that you don't already know.

What I want to do is place this day in a theological context.

The title "Good God!" emerged out of an early conversation in the planning group. "Good God!" is often an expression of exasperation and for many of us that is exactly what we feel. We are hanging on by our fingertips to a church which seems to be trying to solve the wrong problems...

But Good God! Is also an expression of confidence – "Sing of the Lord's goodness!"

We hope that today will give us a safe space to share our exasperation – because many of us don't have enough safe spaces within the church – and that is shameful...

But we don't want today to end with exasperation.

We want to find a different voice, a voice of strength and courage which can speak to our church and churches about the God who is good. I am encouraged to see that we represent different churches and know that some of our traditions have made more progress than others...

I look forward to being encouraged by your positive experiences, thank you for being here today!

When I think of God's goodness I start with the stories of God's creativity.

I have a wonderful picture book which you might like to look at – Big Mama with her child on her hip sees all that she has made and says, "It is good, it is very good"

Eden gives us an image of a beautiful garden, a world where everything has its place...

These images are like paintings or music. They accompany us as we consider the wonderful world in which we live, its potential for such creativity, such lovingkindness and its potential for such destruction and what can only be described as evil... God is always present, not just in what we might describe as good but also when we threaten to destroy that which is good. God does not abandon us but remains present.

As we consider the state of the church and our own place within it, I hope that you will be able to hear the beautiful music of a world which God listens to and rejoices in; that you might reclaim the wonder and amazement of a universe which holds so many treasures... It is so very good. The church is meant to be good news for the whole world... it is up to us to do all that we can to ensure that it is.

As Christians we look to Jesus to reveal to us the nature of God...

I don't know about you but I find it very difficult to see how anyone can justify a fundamentalist reading of the Gospels.

Just as the stories of creation feed our imagination and provoke us to consider our own experience in the light of God's activity in the world, so we are given different accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We are invited to enter into conversation with these texts in order to form a living relationship with the one who was so open to God that we can catch a glimpse of what love looks like...

Jesus was uncompromising. He embodied God's sense of joy in the rich potential of this world but he was dismayed at the ways in which human beings had isolated people and denied them access to the power of God's grace.

Jesus told the kind of stories that can take root within the listeners and continue to grow in us.

Last week we heard once again the story which we call "The Good Samaritan" and I asked the congregation here to consider whether this was really a story about 4 people or whether it was a comment on the way we relate to one another in society:

"Those who represent the moral good or the legal high ground quite often avoid engaging with those whose chances of prospering are most compromised. The people who have the power to effect change, to bring others back to life, are those who engage, those who listen, those who notice what is going on around them, whatever their social standing."

As we gather together today we can choose to stay angry with those in authority who aren't doing enough to bring about change, or we can use our anger to cross the road and do something positive. If we are the one beaten up and left for dead we might be surprised at who reaches out to us.

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus breaking the religious rules.

He told stories of a headstrong teenager who squandered their inheritance ending up living with pigs and yet received a royal welcome when they eventually returned home...

He told of a woman who mixed the rancid leaven into a lump of dough and was able to feed all who were hungry

He spoke with those he was told to avoid; he ate with Tax Collectors and touched those who were infectious – even on the Sabbath.

He encouraged women to sit at his feet as disciples and let them serve him; and he washed the dirty feet of his tired and confused followers.

And ultimately Jesus himself was broken, like the bread we share at the Eucharist, to allow the goodness of God to feed all who are hungry for justice; to quench the thirst of all who are parched of integrity.

As we gather together today may we be a community formed by the extravagant hope of the resurrection – that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

May we find new courage to discover Christ in our midst reminding us of our baptismal experience – behold, this is my child, in whom I delight!

I am here because I do believe in God's abundant goodness
And I am here because I need you to help my unbelief.

Thank you for coming today, I look forward to learning together.