

Introduction to the Good God! Study Day

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During the course of the 47 years I have been ordained, the C of E has institutionalised discrimination in the areas of sexual identity and gender. It has, I believe, become captive to law and has shackled grace. It's difficult to live with integrity in such a church, except by battering at the walls and campaigning for change.

We had a clear example of this recently in a communication from someone in another part of the country who had hoped to come today, but were prevented by family circumstances. They feel very alienated, isolated and discriminated against by the way in which women's calling is ignored and women are belittled and unsupported by the local priest, particularly when trying to help a person in dire need; and also by the way that a gay young man was simply informed that he had to marry a woman.

In this situation in which we still find ourselves, and facing an increasingly incredulous world, those of us who have arranged this study day believe fervently that we need to develop a robust theology and a Christian anthropology fit for gospel we claim to proclaim, so that we can help set the agenda rather than simply react (often with horror) to other people's views and prevarications. We have to resist and to challenge. We have to do so graciously and lovingly, but clear-sightedly.

Today is designed to help equip us do this. We must avoid the destructive negativity of pouring abuse on those with whom we disagree, even if we have to bear such behaviour directed against ourselves. This is a liberation struggle, a gospel imperative as we try to respond faithfully to the God who in Jesus embodied radical inclusion, the God who in Jesus opened wide the arms of love on the cross that all might be drawn and enfolded within it.

It's our intention that this day, and this building, will be a safe place for everyone; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, please seek out one of the clergy, or me, and let us know. As you know, we've asked you to indicate your preferred pronouns; this is part of what it means to relate respectfully to one another; (and as some here know about me, it takes time to get right!).