

TUESDAY COMMUNION
"God of freedom and choice".

Hymn: 36 God is love: let heaven adore him

Reading: Isaiah 45. 21-25

Prayers:

Many of us are aware that there is a great debate in our modern world about the existence of God and, if there is a God, the nature of God.

Isaiah challenges both the people of Israel and the people of other faiths and other nations to join in a great debate about the nature of God and his work.

Their questions are both similar and different to ours.

- Their first big question was whether there are many gods or whether there is only one God.
- The second question, which links to the one we also ask, was, if there is a God, what sort of a God is he?

I watched a fascinating programme on Sunday evening called "Aristotle's lagoon". Over 300 years before the birth of Jesus, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, spent two years on the Aegean island of Lesbos.

During his stay on the island, he wrote about the natural life that surrounds this extraordinary lagoon with its rich collection of birds, fish and vegetation. He dissected the fish that were caught and thought deeply about how life reproduces itself. Why does one form of life reproduce itself and what is the process by which this happens?

The person who led us in this fascinating exploration of the work of Aristotle was himself a biologist. At one point he declared that Aristotle has left us with only two choices:

1. To believe that God made everything or
2. To believe in what science reveals.

I groaned inwardly as this clever man invited us to choose between an obscurantist faith (which has nothing to do with the world as we know it) and what he saw as the clear, shining light of scientific understanding which provides all the wisdom and understanding we need.

Isaiah invited his generation to think deeply about the nature of God. He wanted them to put aside old ideas and beliefs which no longer spoke to the new insights God was giving to them.

The first of these new insights was that there is but one God and not a multitude of gods.

"I am God and there is no other."

Ancient Israel accepted the generally held belief that there are many gods. Each of those was attached to a particular people.

So, Israel has her own God but so do the other nations. One of the challenges for those slaves in Babylon was to recognise that there is but one God. This one God was with them just as much in a foreign land as he was in Israel.

For us, too, there is the challenge to recognise that wherever we are, even when our lives take us into unfamiliar territory new experiences, new thoughts, new work, he is there with us.

The second insight was that he is the God of all people and that he reaches out in love to all people.

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.”

What Jews and Christians have never found easy is to believe that the one God is truly the God of all people. If we believe that is true, it alters our attitude to them because they become the people God cherishes, and who we have to cherish, too!

In America, Pat Robinson, a rabid preacher and far-right politician declares that the Haiti earthquake is God's judgement on the people of that country because some of them are caught in voodoo. Not only that, but many of his ilk suggest that the people of Haiti should not be helped.

It's not America's concern!

God has given freedom to his creation as it changes from generation to generation. He has also given us the freedom to do good or to do evil. In his character, he is the God of love who shares in our suffering and bids us love and care for one another.

As Isaiah would remind us, he is the universal God who desires to save (in every sense of that word) all the people of this earth and, today, especially the people of Haiti.

Amen.