



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Healing Mass 22nd April 2020

I wonder, if you had to sum up the Christian gospel in a sentence, how would you do it? What is the real essence of Christianity?

Someone once asked a Bishop that question; in answer he didn't quote from a great theologian, but instead a couple of lines from a children's hymn:

Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

He could equally have quoted the first couple of lines of today's gospel;

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

I remember singing that verse in a performance of the Crucifixion by John Stainer at a time I was coming to faith as a teenager; it really spoke to my heart.

You may have heard it recently sung by the choir

of St Marylebone Parish Church on Good Friday. Those verses sum it all up.

It has the right number of characters to be tweeted. Christianity in a nutshell.

If all the gospels were taken away and that sentence alone remained,

you would still have the essentials.

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

What Holy Week and Easter have shown us is that God takes the initiative;

everything comes from God's love for the whole world and a desire to redeem it,

to draw it to himself. You may have heard that wonderful poem by R S Thomas

called the Coming. It speaks of a weary world in need of hope, in need of a loving saviour, suffering with decay and evil. This is how it goes:

*And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce*

*Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.*

*On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.*

We may not always feel or believe that God loves us; in times like this it can be difficult to know that. But that is the heart of the Christian gospel, as Pope Francis has said ‘When all is said and done, we are infinitely loved.’

If we find it hard to pray at the moment, let us just rest in those eternal arms knowing that God eternally takes the initiative in demonstrating his sacrificial love for us. That love will be there whether we are inspired or despairing, productive or depressed, connected or isolated, generous or remote. That is how infinitely precious God’s love in Christ is – it is entirely unconnected with anything we do or offer but remains constant. My prayer is for you who are watching, that you will know the love of the risen Jesus this week, for it surrounds you and sustains you whether you feel it or not, and will do forever more.