

Dear Friends,

I have reason to believe that “the gods” are angry with Tom, one of our youth leaders. Our JAM session on 2nd November was a firework evening at the vicarage. Apart from the usual display on the ground we had been firing off rockets with ooo’s and aaah’s and the occasional “that was rubbish”. Of course you never remember on these days, that what goes up must come down, but down one came right on Tom’s head! “Ooo that hurt” said Tom, “I’m glad I had my hat on!”

This incident reminded me of a film I’d seen some time ago. It started with a coke bottle falling from an aeroplane passing over Africa. It fell as it happened on the head of a native who had never seen such a thing before and wondered why “the gods” had sent him such a strange gift. The mystery deepened as the native struggled to find what use this gift from “the gods” could be put to and why, despite trying really hard “the gods” wouldn’t take the gift back when he threw it up in the air.

These, perhaps, are trifling issues, I am sure that many people feel “the gods” are angry with them. Life doesn’t always run smoothly and many people walk in darkness. Illness, loneliness and despair can all be close companions of anyone of us or those whom we love. “What have I done to deserve this?” or “When will it all end?” are questions that roll around our hearts and minds. It is so easy to have that feeling that everyone else has an easy life or even get away with it all, well until they’re found out anyway.

It looks like we have a number of new lists of those who have been found out lately. We have government ministers who seem to do what they like, but we have a weak government at the moment because the last election was indecisive. We also have the revelations of the ‘Paradise Papers’ revealing the way big companies and wealthy individuals are using legal loopholes to avoid paying their taxes. In my mind though, I’m a bit unsure about this one as we are continually told they haven’t broken the law. Of course there is an argument that if you’re wealthy enough to use these facilities you should be paying more tax, but sadly tax avoidance is legal, tax evasion is not. Maybe it’s the government that should be sorting things out and making sure these loopholes are closed. It is interesting who the BBC target with all of these revelations and I feel it reveals something of their prejudices. I think there is a world of difference between Apple, who clearly are using their experts to find every legal loophole they can, whilst the Royal Family on the other hand, are not liable for tax but pay it voluntarily and have investors who look after their estates.

However, sad to say, sleaze is back on the agenda. In the wake of the downfall of Harvey Weinstein there is a whole host of famous figures who have come under scrutiny. Not least of course our wonderful politicians. I am the last one to defend those caught being naughty, and those who have fallen on their swords have done so rightly. However, it does seem sometimes that we have a process of trial by media, not helped of course by all this fake news I reflected on in the past. I don’t understand why the matters are not immediately placed in the hands of the police. Instead we have all of these alternative investigations going on by one party or another and my fear is that they could easily obscure the facts of the matter leading to two possibilities. On one side we could have the innocent swept up with the guilty and on the other the guilty who manage to evade justice.

At the end of the day we only get the institutions that we deserve. There is an argument that those in high office should set an example to the rest of us and to a very large extent I would agree with that principle. On the other hand, when these men and women are drawn from the society around us they are clearly going to reflect the makeup and the morality of the people of our age. We are all frail people who are addicted to sin. We might think our little errors are nothing compared to the next person, let alone the rich, famous and powerful. Of course wealth, fame and power increase our capacity to sin but that doesn’t let us off the hook. Paul tells us “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3 vs 23) and John writes “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1 vs 8). So we can’t point at other people and say that they are worse sinners than us. If “the gods” are angry, they are angry with us all!

Before we all move into total despair there is hope for us all, because the one true God has acted to help us in our time of need. He is not remote or condemning, but comes to us with a

Fatherly love and brings an answer to our every need. Our Father God does not let His anger with sin bring condemnation to the sinner. He comes to us, lives with us and shows His love by coming into our deepest darkness bringing eternal light. We have no ability to deal with sin other than to either sweep it under the carpet, or magnify it and neither work. So God comes into the world into the depth of our despair and wrong doing. He comes in human form so that He can share the full extent of our weakness. Paul tells us that what we could not do “God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man.” (Romans 8 vs 3).

This is what we celebrate at Christmas, God coming into our world, coming to be among us as one of us. He was born a baby exactly like each one of us, so that He could demonstrate that He had penetrated the deepest human darkness that there is. He got caught up in all the human mess, pain, darkness, despair and wilful sin, but He never sins Himself. He does however take the responsibility for our sin on His shoulders, because the Child in the Manger is the Man on the Cross. As Paul says “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5 vs 21).

One of the titles that Jesus is given at His birth is “Immanuel” which means “God is with us” (Matthew 1 vs 23). This means that through Jesus, God is with us in every situation, place and circumstance. If we want to know that truth, we also need to go on a journey in our hearts and kneel in our minds at the Manger in the Stable in Bethlehem, with angels, shepherds and wise men. We need to ask for the “Child to be born in us today” so that we know that Jesus is not just with us but in us. When we seek and pray humbly for this we will know God’s love fully and completely, to give hope and the ability to let Him change our lives not just in a good way but to make us perfect. We have this hope as a promise we receive, “Christ in you the hope of glory”.

Please do have a happy and Holy Christmas and know God’s blessings for you and all you love in the New Year.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert