

St Augustine's and St Mary's Reflective Sheet January 17th 2021

The reflection this week is written by Claire.

Readings: Psalm 139 (John 1.43 -end; 1 Samuel 3.1-10)

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

We are now into our second week of Lockdown and as the reality and grimness of the situation beds in we are having to dig a bit deeper and find some sustaining resources to get us through. Our hope is that the vaccine will end all of this for us, but the reality will be some dark weeks ahead and a very sobering rising daily death toll. We can do very little to change any of these external realities. All we can do is hunker down and get through, our task at this time is to stay home reduce all our social contacts and stop the spread of this awful virus.

The bleakness of the situation around us contrasts sharply with the hope and joy of the Epiphany Season which we are marking within our Christian calendar. I am reminded of the writings of Kahlil Gibran: *Then a woman said, Speak to us of joy and sorrow. And he answered: Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the self-same well from which your laughter rises were oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper the sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds the wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives. When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you will find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. (Extract from The Prophet).*

O God, you search me and you know me. All my thoughts lie open to your gaze. When I walk or lie down you are before me: ever the maker and keeper of my days.

Although your Spirit is upon me, Still I search for shelter from your light. There is nowhere on earth I can escape you: even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me, Gave me life within my mother's womb. For the wonder of who I am, I praise you: safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

Bernadette Farrell

When we face confusion and uncertainty we tend to want to run away. Like the disciples in the boat when the storm picked up around them, they wanted the storm to go away and were fearful of drowning (Mark 4:35-41). In spite of Jesus being with them in the boat, their fears rose up and blinded them and they wanted out, they wanted the storm to stop! Another example that comes to mind is of Elijah running away in the desert and hiding in a cave because he felt defeated and on his own (1 Kings 19). And there is something to be said about being able to run away from everything. My desire at times is to be a hedgehog to hibernate now through this dark winter and wake up in the beautiful spring when life and certainty returns to the land.

What we face at this time is a season that none of us will have ever experienced before in our lives and we hope never to have to experience again, so we can be forgiven for being confused, exhausted, wanting to run and hibernate from everything around us.

When I have been out walking, I have noticed how long my shadow is. It is the low winter light that casts a long shadow, and the shadows are longest at this time of year. The shadows are what can spook us; they resemble our fears and anxieties and can loom larger than life itself and stop us in our tracks. But the reality is the shadows are not real, they are simply shadows and often created in our own minds, they are tricks we play upon ourselves. When the fullness of light comes the shadows disappear. Like the storm around the disciples calming through the presence of Jesus, the One true light. The night as we know always gives way to the dawn.

The psalmist echoes much of these sentiments: *Where can I go from your spirit ... or flee from your presence? How can I run away from it all... But if I make my bed in Sheol you are there! If I settle on the far limits of the sea even there your right hand shall hold me fast! If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Ps 139. 7-12).*

This winter season is as much God's as the spring and the summer we are hoping and longing for. Yes, our shadows may be longer, but they have only been created because of the light. God's light and God's love. As we cannot change the pandemic around us so we cannot change the ever faithfulness of God or diminish his light or his love. There is a constancy to this as manifested in the presence of Jesus asleep in the boat. We can be forgiven if like the disciples we want to shake Jesus up, wake him up... but I suggest he is already and always fully alert and fully awake.

This simple prayer may be helpful in centring yourself within God's love at the heart of whatever storm of life you may find yourself. Take some time with it, centre yourself and your breathing – allowing God to inhabit both your light and your shadow. The prayer has four phases: surrendering to God; a transformation/change, a movement forward; a promise and renewal of God's covenant and grace; and then the possibility of new life together with God.

Take, O take me as I am;

Summon out what I shall be;

Set your seal upon my heart

And live in me. (John Bell)

Collect for the Second Sunday of Epiphany

Eternal Lord,

Our beginning and our end:

Bring us with the whole creation

To your glory, hidden through ages

And made known

In Jesus Christ our Lord.