

Sunday 4 August 2024
The Tenth Sunday After Trinity

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Ecclesiasticus 42:15-end
NT: Hebrews 11:17-31

So here we are, just a short way into the school summer holidays. It is supposed to be a time of refreshment, a break and a rest. However, the events that have unfolded this week in Southport have been horrific. Three little girls losing their lives and several injured whilst enjoying time off school. I dedicated the Friday Eucharist to Bebe, Elsie and Alice and their respective families. There has been huge unrest, not only in Southport, but throughout the country with outbreaks of violence. There has been pockets of positive action and a few of my friends who are priests in Southport, have been able to strengthen their links with their multi-faith partners in their communities. Throughout life, there are moments for tears, tears have been shed in bucket loads this week by all who have heard about the events. Sometimes we avoid any expression of lament in public worship, but I feel it is important for us as a community to recognise this is an extremely sad time for the families of the three little girls and all who were involved this week. All we can do is offer to God a cry of lament.

In contrast, our reading from Ecclesiasticus speaks of the wonderful works of the Lord and how desirable they are and how sparkling they are. Who could ever tire of His glory? It is important to cling onto that knowledge that God is full of glory and is all knowing and only wants good for us, we must cling onto that in these really dark times. In Hebrews we hear one of my favourite passages about faith. We learn about the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and, thankfully, Rahab a woman gets mention. I believe everyone's faith journey is different. I became a Christian at a Billy Graham event in Anfield when I was thirteen. However, since then, my journey of faith has evolved, changed, developed and taken many twists and turns. We are all different, and however we come to understand God and know Jesus as Lord, is just as valid as anyone else's experience.

Faith is individual and can be strengthened and tested by different life events. My faith was strengthened in 2011 and the experiences I had of God working in the lives of myself, my husband and my daughter was instrumental in my journey to the Priesthood. This year was significant, I had just become the Lay Chair of the formerly known Bootle Deanery Synod and I was really enjoying this role. Three sets of events then happened. I was treated unfairly in my workplace by a senior manager, not my current employer Liverpool City Council I hasten to add; my daughter needed to change school; and finally, my husband had an illness that required an operation. God really came through and worked in our lives in this year. I was placed in a much better working environment, Lily's school move was a success and Kevin's operation, through the power of prayer and the expertise of the surgeon, was a success. God is good! That then led to me having a huge feeling of gratitude to God and I wanted to try and give something back. From 2012 to 2019, I was on a journey of faith and discernment that brought me through training to be a Reader and then

to start my training to the Priesthood. I am truly blessed to have travelled this faith journey and to be here as Assistant Priest at this wonderful church. My ordination stole has the image of Kevin, Lily and I and in God's hands, because we are in God's hands.

I have spoken before about the peaks and troughs of life. Faith has kept me going through all that I've experienced during my journey to the Priesthood. The loss of my father-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law and other ups and downs along the way. I'm a great fan of St Ignatius and it was his feast day on Wednesday this week. The main ethos of St Ignatius is finding God in all things. I try to do this and as a way of capturing this, I use a journal. I find journalling really helpful, and it is good to look back on the times when I have felt that all is lost, and I can see how God has been at work. I can read about previous prayers being answered etc. This is a practice that works for me, and as I said earlier, faith is individual, so it might not work for everyone, but it is worth a try.

As we go through our weeks, praying for the brokenness and injustice, we should keep Bebe, Elsie and Alice in our prayers, their parents and families and everyone who was involved in this awful incident. Share our worries with God because he loves each and every one of us.

Henri Nouwen, a famous Christian author, said that his friend had written to him saying, "*Learning to weep, learning to keep vigil, learning to wait for the dawn. Perhaps this is what it means to be human*". Critically, it is also at the heart of what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus. For even as we lament the problems, we and others face, we remember that Jesus himself knew tears of sorrow and loss. Abandoned by his friends, he experienced the pain of the cross. It is right to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for his marvellous works, as in Ecclesiasticus. It is also right to offer lament for a world broken and torn. As the Psalmist of Psalm 88 says, "*Let my prayers come into your presence, incline your ear to my cry*".

Mthr Jennifer Brady