

Over the last couple of weeks I have been getting to know our latest Confirmation Class. The Apostles' Creed, which they will be affirming in the context of their Confirmation next April begins with the basic assertion, 'I believe in God.' And so we have started by thinking through what it means to believe in God. And then what sort of God are we believing in. How can we know this God, how can we relate to this God? What sort of signs are there of his presence in the world? How does God make himself known?

As we draw towards the end of the season of Trinity, as we draw closer to the season of Advent, our lessons, Sunday by Sunday, are beginning to take on a theme of Advent. Our Gospel reading this morning begins with the disciples in Jerusalem and their reaction to seeing the Temple, this seat of God's presence that lay at the heart of Jewish spirituality. We also hear of Jesus talking of its coming destruction. The scene then shifts to the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city. The disciples start to ask Jesus about what he has meant by this talk of destruction, what will be the sign that all this is about to happen.

It is interesting at this point to look at the place of the Mount of Olives, this hill that overlooks the city of Jerusalem, in its wider biblical context. In the prophet Zechariah, the Mount of Olives is a place of great eschatological significance; it is a place of God breaking into the world. the prophet talks of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives, the mountain being split in two.

In Mark's account of the closing week of the ministry of Jesus we find a number of references to the Mount of Olives. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus set out on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Garden is

evidently a place to which Jesus would go to pray. We then have the episode that we have read of today. Finally, after the Last Supper Jesus lead his disciples out to the Mount of Olives, there to pray, to be betrayed and to be lead away prisoner. In placing these events in and around the Mount of Olives, the Gospel writer is presenting us with a very clear picture of God, present in the person of Jesus, on the Mount of Olives, entering into the city, appearing in the Temple.

In sharp contrast with the figure portrayed by Zechariah, the one who comes to the Mount of Olives is one who comes riding on a donkey, one who prays ‘Father let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but yours be done.’ One who gives of himself, empties himself, even unto death, a death on a cross.

Going back to our Confirmation Group, we thought of how God might make himself known in our own day. One of the girls in the class painted a lovely picture of seeing an evening sky, the setting sun behind clouds just above the horizon and rays of sunlight radiating from the cloud. Others spoke of music, some of the songs they sing in the Burrow. There were stories of the teaching and ministry of Jesus, we thought of some of the parables, in particular the parable of the Prodigal Son, the unconditional love of a father towards his wayward son. Then we started thinking about people, seeing God in other people. We can all think of people who have been important in our own spiritual journey. Looking back over my own life I can think of famous people who have inspired me; Archbishop Michael Ramsey, Archbishop George Simms of Armagh, Brother Roger of Taize – individuals who, for me, radiated

something of the presence of God. Then there were those people who impacted on my own person spiritual journey – the Rector and people of St Laurence’s where I had been baptised and to which I returned 17 years later looking and searching – some of my first insights into God were in the faces I met in that place.

Then we started thinking – If I can see something of God in other people, what about other people being able to see something of God in us? We started to think of the Church as the Body of Christ and in that body everyone has a place, everyone has a part to play. I go back to the prayer of Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

The disciples asked of Jesus, ‘What are the signs that all this is about to happen?’ He basically said, look around you. What are the signs of Christ’s presence in the world of today? Look around you. You and I are called to be signs of Christ in the world of today; called to be the feet, the hands, the eyes, the body of Christ. You are called to be signs of Christ on the street in which you live, in the office in which you work, in the club in which you play, in the

casual conversations with friend and neighbour; signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world.