

## Trinity 1 – Grenfell Tower

One night in 1981 I was awoken by a fire alarm as I slept in my bedroom on the 24<sup>th</sup> floor of Kelson Tower, a tower block on the Isle of Dogs. Peering down I saw a fleet of fire engines, lights blazing, surrounding the building. It was the only time I ever truly felt frightened living at that height, completely isolated and aware of just a single staircase adjacent to the lift as our means of escape. This was amongst the very first memories that surfaced for me early last Wednesday morning.

When tragedy strikes, as it did at Grenfell Tower this week, and as it did in Borough Market and at Manchester Arena only weeks earlier, any experiences or knowledge of place or environment we may have speedily come to mind as we attempt to somehow place ourselves in the story too as a way of expressing our solidarity and our sympathy with those caught up by terrible events. We want to draw close to the events as a way of expressing our love, our fear, our thankfulness and our sorrow.

What happened last Wednesday morning was certainly a tragedy but it may also turn out to be a corporate crime made possible by political indifference.

It is also an event with theological consequences. For such a terrible loss of life in very public and powerless circumstances draws attention to apparent weaknesses in our understanding of the nature of God and of God's love.

I'm fond of trying to reassure people who tell me that they don't believe in God, by saying that I don't believe in the God they don't believe in either.

It is important to be clear about the kind of God we do believe in and the kind of power and influence we believe God holds.

In the light of Grenfell Tower it would be easy to declare that God is absent from this world, to revive that old 1960s argument that God is dead.

But that would be to ascribe to God an interventionist nature inconsistent with the post-Pentecost Christian tradition.

At this point I find it helpful to remind ourselves of the core components of the Christian faith.

God's promise to redeem humanity was made manifest in the incarnation - the gift of His Son, Emmanuel, meaning God with us. God the creator, fulfilled God's promise through the gift of God the Son - the birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus – and at Pentecost God became universally available to all through the gift of God the Holy Spirit. Only last week we celebrated this diversity and unity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit on Trinity Sunday.

In all of this, the freedom of humanity to act in opposition to God's will is preserved. For it is only with free will that we are able to journey towards God. As is so clear in the gospel stories of Jesus, miraculous interventions by Jesus were a pretty ineffective way to generate disciples although they did generate lots of followers. Disciples are made through a genuine metanoia of the heart; of a turning around away from sin and towards Christ, as our baptism service continues to proclaim.

The presence of evil in the world, and all the victims that result from evil acts, is not evidence of the absence of God, only of a fallen humanity.

For evidence of the presence of God, one only has to open ones eyes to see the overwhelming, heart warming and absolutely humbling response of humanity in the face of tragedy; of people of all faiths and none for whom a tragedy has released in them a depth of the human spirit they may never have previously known they owned.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the message this week that Joan Bond received from the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission in Calcutta that EducAid India supports; It read....

*We are very shocked to know that a lot of people have been distress due to severe fire attack at Grenfel Tower, London. As we are great supporter of people who are in distress, therefore on behalf of the Mission's students, staff and monks we have decided to pay Rs. 25,000/- in the relief fund for food and rehabilitation of the victim. Please let me know your Bank details so that we can*

*transfer the money to your account or you may deduct this amount for the purpose noted above as our contribution from the grant you usually send for various welfare projects run by you at the Mission.*

*We shall be highly obliged if the small amount is spent for the victim as our love and support for them.*

You see, the poor understand what it means to be poor in a way we never can.

The Spirit of God is thriving in our country at present but sadly it is taking some truly horrific incidents to open our eyes. The Spirit is working through the church, but not exclusively so, and perhaps not even primarily so. And this is the second area of theological challenge for us at times like this. For we cannot deny the Christ-like acts of countless people of other faiths or none as they respond to these national tragedies. The Church has much to learn from others' understanding of service and sacrifice.

Which brings me briefly to this morning's gospel reading, a very challenging description of mission and discipleship, service and sacrifice, risk and faith.

Out of all the great nuggets in today's passage, I draw out just one.... "You received without payment, give without payment"

The gift of faith exceeds all other gifts imaginable and it is entirely free and unconditional. Nothing summarises it better than the famous words from 1 Chronicles 29 - For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

We give – money, time, talents, lives – because we have received so much. And although we give without any expectation of reward thanks is important and I'm so glad that this is a community that says thank you.

But we cannot earn God's thanks. In these uncertain times the constancy and consistency of God's love is deeply reassuring; there is nothing we can do to make God love us any more, and nothing we can do to make God love us any less either. God simply is love.

When we've been touched by that love, when we recognise the many blessings of our lives, the natural response is to pass it on to others using whatever gifts God has given us.

Today, we give thanks for one person in particular, for his ministry of music freely, devotedly, unconditionally offered to us for the past 20 years. Words are always insufficient, never crafted to the degree we would wish, never comprehensive enough to express all that is deserved. And so today David we simply say thank you.

Each of us, at every stage of our lives, has great gifts to offer God, the church and one another. Like the first 12 disciples a heavy load falls on too few shoulders and we need more labourers for the harvest. And we need to set our priorities clearly and sometimes that involves a bit of shaking of dust off our feet as we lay down some ideas in order to focus on others. But above all we need trust and faith in God that our giftings will be revealed to us and that we may have the confidence to speak and live in His name. So may our prayer this week be a growing confidence in the Spirit...

“Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say for it is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Amen.