

John 3: 22 - 36

Are you there God?

I'd be surprised if that isn't a question that hasn't passed your lips.

In our reading this evening we have had the arch pointer to Jesus, John the Baptist. All his life he has known that his role was to point the way to the Messiah, to prepare people for that moment when the Saviour would appear.

In this reading we hear him say: **'My joy has been fulfilled'** in much the same way as Simeon does – as we sing in the Nunc Dimittis – knowing that his allotted task has been completed.

And yet, a little later, when he is in prison, he sends his friends to Jesus to ask: **'I was right wasn't I – you are who I've told people you are?'** Jesus tells him to look at the evidence and says: **'You know it'**.

I find it comforting that even the most believing of believers can be caught off guard by doubt.

I say this because who of us does not have the role of pointing Jesus out to the non-believer, who of us is not responsible for making paths clear so that Jesus's knock is heard. Our passage ended with the uncomfortable words: **'whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.'**

The Message version of the Bible transcribes these words as: **'The person who avoids and distrusts the Son is in the dark and doesn't see life. All he experiences of God is darkness and an angry darkness at that'**.

It's a verse that makes you feel the pressure!

John the Baptist, knowing the groom (Jesus) has claimed his bride (the human race) says: **'He must increase, but I must decrease'**.

I value the translation and commentary of Nicholas King and he asks here whether this applies to us, as well as to John the Baptist. Perhaps your first thought to that question is, 'I would love to decrease but who is there to take on the jobs I do?' There's a chicken and egg type situation here isn't there ... perhaps we need to work harder, better, differently to enable the younger generations to hear our Master's voice and, it has to be said, not only those youngsters who are off-mentioned, but also our peers for they are also absent from our pews.

Perhaps also, we could hear the question differently, and perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether we act with too much of us and not enough of Jesus.

I think we must caution ourselves against falling into despair about our apparently limited effectiveness as path clearers. I was listening to Joyce DiDonato speaking about performing opera in Sing Sing Prison in New York. Her experience has been, that even though many of her audience have no idea about opera, the music opens up the floodgates to emotions and to knowing you're not alone. It has a power, especially live performed, to be a bridge builder.

Faith is not a thing, I have read this week, it is more like a window that affects the way we see through it. Our scriptures can and do speak for themselves. Our ways of worship are dramatic structures which enable us to join together to express ourselves as believers together. Their effect can be that of bridge building.

And, never forgetting, that more powerful than anything we can do is what Jesus can and does do himself as God, Jesus and / or Holy Spirit.

Although tonight's passage ended with those very solemn words, I want to remind you of the verse which comes from this same chapter, John, Chapter 3, verse 16

'For God so loved the world - not that he was so angry with the world but – so LOVED the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'. Amen.