

All Souls Eucharist

Wednesday 2 November 2022

God's love for the world, and our response to God's love, is an interlacing rhythm that is taking place in the beating heart of all creation, now. Living and departed, past, present and future, all things, seen and unseen, are held within the tenderness of God's love for the world.

We see that love, incomprehensibly, astonishingly, in one another, and in the smallest of simple things. There can be grand gestures and extravagant, lavish experiences of love in the world. And there can be a small, nearly tasteless brittle wafer, pressed gently into the palm of your hand, which is the body of God's own love at work in the world. It is Christ who has invited us to gather here, so that we can receive his presence even as we immerse ourselves in that strange interlacing rhythm of life and death, loss and hope. When this small brittle wafer is given to you, consider that it is God, God's own self, who is feeding you. In this church, for over three centuries, fragments of small brittle wafers have been passed from hand to hand. Countless. In times of sorrow and in times of joy. Every time we eat this bread, we are reminded that we are always living in unity with God, even when the tensions and divisions of life – enormous and tiny – threaten to rip at the seams of things. Meditating on the reality that there is one bread, and one body, as we hear in our Eucharistic prayer, St Augustine said, 'Let your mind assimilate that statement and be glad, for there you will find unity, truth, devotion and love. Bear in mind that bread is not made of a single grain, but of many. Be, then, what you see, and receive what you are.'

The writer John-Paul Flintoff has just published a book of poetry, *Psalms for the City*. They're a love song to London, for anyone and everyone, inspired by his encounters with scripture.

Here is one of them:

Lifetime

I'm born, I cry
I blink, I eat
I sit, I laugh
I hold my feet
I stand, I walk
I'm at the fork
I choose my path
I soon regret
I jump through hoops
I learn, I run
I fly, I boast
I fail, like most
When others die
I hide my cry
I see you not
I ask for what
I haven't got
I'm on my knees
I don't know how
I see you now.

When we receive this sign of hope, small and brittle, vast and creation-sustaining, we say 'Amen.' We hear 'the body of Christ, keep you in eternal life.' We say 'Amen.' That affirming small two-syllable word, spoken quietly, under the breath, is our consent, and our assent too. It is us saying 'yes, I want this.' 'Yes, I agree.' And that has been said countless times here, by people whose names we know, and by people whose names we do not know. God's love for the world, and our response to God's love, is a drama which is being played out, in our prayers, our lives and our persistence in saying 'Amen.' 'Yes, I want this promise of eternal life to be true.' 'Yes, I consent to being fed in this way, with you, at this table.' This table, the altar, is a place where heaven and earth are in contact. That contact – the sacrament of the Eucharist – draws all of time and history together. Every moment that has ever been, every quickening pulse, every breath, ever memory – it is all here. All in this bread and wine. It is a time to remember, so that we can re-imagine. As we gather to remember loved ones by name, a space opens for lament. This lament, this grief, is a place of persistent hope, however frail. It is a place of vulnerability. We can say 'Amen' in the resonant quiet of our hearts when that small brittle wafer, God's body, is placed in our hands. We can stay with the hurt, while immersed in hope. The writer Cole Arthur Riley says:

In lament, our task is never to convince someone of the brokenness of this world; it is to convince them of the world's worth in the first place.' When the uncertainty of that worth is drawn into focus, we can return to that altar of love, the place where heaven and earth meet, and let ourselves breathe into the word 'Amen', because all that is, living and departed, past, present and future, all people, all things, seen and unseen, are held within the tenderness of God's love for the world. Amen.