

**Sunday 4th November 2018 All Saints Day What is our perspective?
Revelation 21:1-6 John 11:32-44**

Mary finally found Jesus outside the village
If only you had been there.... She said !!! If only....
Jesus shuddered with emotion and was deeply moved with tenderness and compassion

Several of us are, over these few weeks, remembering the death of a loved one, someone we loved and who we can no longer share life with. Maybe we are shuddering with emotion. Maybe we are moved to tears. Maybe we want to say to Jesus... If only You had been there.

In our gospel reading we see Mary, in the rawness of her grief, having courage and reaching out to Jesus. We don't know what Mary was thinking when she & Martha took Jesus to the tomb, the tomb where they had laid their dead brother.

But we do get a sense that they believed that Jesus could have made a difference. They reached out to Jesus and experienced something extraordinary... something that no one could have foreseen

In the face of death, new life emerged. Lazarus, after being dead for 4 days, was raised to life.

If Jesus had been there and healed Lazarus, then that would have been amazing
But to see your brother raised from the dead... I cannot imagine.
And the understanding and perspective of Mary, Martha and all those there was changed.

Faith, like Mary's, takes courage
And courage enables us to see new and unexpected things.

Last weekend we celebrated the 25th anniversary of this building. It was intriguing to watch a film of the demolition of the much loved wooden church and the building of this one. Watching the round window being rolled into the still unfinished structure and positioned up there was fantastic. The artist who created it had courage and vision for what would be.

Going back even further, someone, almost 140 years ago, had courage to start a church here in Owlsmoor when there were very few houses and very few settled inhabitants in the area. They needed courage. And they must have had a vision of what might become... of what could grow, here in this place.

As you came in to church this morning, you cannot have missed the beautiful cascade of poppies suspended from the bell tower.

Months ago Gill spoke to me about the possibilities of creating a poppy cascade. A vision of what could be created grew within her and, with a lot of courage, she has galvanised a large group of people to knit, crochet and paint over 1000 poppies and this week all those individually made poppies have been gathered together to form the cascade.

Gill had the vision and the courage and the faith to see the project through.

Every person who made a poppy, whether 1 poppy or 100, whether 3 years old or 83 years old, trusted Gills inspiration and did their bit to finally produce the work of art.

Faith in ourselves, others, and God, takes great courage but it also enables us to see new and unexpected things, a vision of new things, like our first reading from Revelation: 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth...'

Revelation is a book that many of us struggle with. The imagery and message within it are sometimes a bit baffling. The symbolic language is extravagant and can be frightening.

But maybe at its heart, it can be seen as a book of consolation, a vision of comfort for a people persecuted and in distress.

John, when he wrote it, was in exile... being persecuted

There were Jews who had become Christians in a Roman world, members of an heretical wing of a minority faith barely tolerated by a brutal empire. Yet what John saw and wrote about and then the new believers saw and preached, was a vision of a universal humanity, a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city coming down from heaven. These promises were trustworthy and true in the midst of everything - all the turmoil and fear around them.

John's vision lifts him out of the everyday life, with ALL its incredible challenges, and takes him to a heavenly realm where he can view an earthly existence from a different perspective - God's perspective. In the midst of the persecution and exile, John sees and records a picture of renewal and beauty. He describes comfort in the midst of suffering and grief.

When we are in the midst of a situation, whatever that may be, good or bad, we can so easily become blinkered and narrow in our vision and in our thinking. We so quickly lose our usual perspective and certainly a Godly perspective!

My home, at the moment, is full of contrasting situations.

Within the space of an hour we can go - quite literally from

- a conversation about wedding planning - possible venue, or music, or bridesmaids dresses, or...
- to a phone call discussing the imminent need for terminal care for a close friend who probably has only weeks to live
- to who is cooking what for dinner and do we need to do some shopping
- to how on earth am I going to find the right care package for mum who wants to be at home but cannot manage
- to what craft activity are we doing at Messy Mondays tomorrow

Each one of those conversations, and all the rest, are critical at the moment that we have them BUT they are all very focussed on the here and now, the every day life, and it has, if I am honest, been hard this week to look beyond the here and now, beyond the immediate challenge or joy of each situation as it raises its head. And there have been moments when it has been hard to think how on earth I was even going to get to today.

My perspective has been clipped, blinkered, and has so easily become distorted.

The French monk and spiritual writer, Thomas Merton once said this: "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."

PICTURES.....

What is this.....?

Gill had a vision, and saw the possibility, of a cascade of poppies

140 years ago someone had a vision, and saw the possibility of a worshipping community here in Owlsmoor

26/27 years ago Martin had a vision and saw the possibility of a brick built church here in Owlsmoor

And, as Christians, God has provided us with a vision and the certainty, for those who believe and surrender to Him, of a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city where God will dwell with us, and where there will be no more pain or death or tears.

He promises that He is making all things new.

Hindsight can be a wonderful thing. We look back and see where we have come from, we can see how difficult situations have worked out, we can see how courageous visions have been implemented and come to fruition.

But Hindsight is not always helpful. We don't always come to understand why something is as it is? Or why something is allowed to happen... Why doesn't Jesus come now and put an end to all suffering????

It is harder to take the blinkers off and look forward and see our earthly challenges from a heavenly perspective.

But, as Christians we have a promise that can give us hope - we believe we are headed back to God, to an eternal communion with God

Whatever the challenges and trials of today are, we share a hope and a promise with all the saints that have gone before us and all those who will come after us, that one day we shall share eternity with Him, our risen Lord and Saviour

In our gospel reading Jesus said - I have said this that they may believe... and if you believe you will see the glory of God, God unveil his power

SO let us take on Mary's courage and John's vision, and keep our hope and trust and sight on what is to come, lifting our eyes off the here and now and looking to Him who is our Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end, praying that He will give us a glimpse of His perspective.