

‘God where were you when the fire came through?’

This is an understandable question and behind it is one of the most profound requests humankind continues to ask. Where is God in tragedy? Some would add, ‘How can anyone believe in a God who allows this sort of thing to happen.’

(And, you, Ruth, have the temerity to talk to us about something you only experienced second-hand? Oh, I’m trembling at the thought all right. But what do we really make of it all?)

Some of us call ourselves spiritual, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, agnostic or atheists - and that’s accepted. We all need to find our own way.

We know that suffering is a fact but we can do better than to shrug and say, ‘That’s life.’ Given that this service is under the Christian umbrella, may I begin by saying that I BELIEVE that there is one loving God and that Christians are called to be followers of Jesus. I also acknowledge that there is a power of evil.

God endows the gift of CHOICE to us humans. If we have no choices we are simply marionettes, manipulated from above by strings. So we choose – and sometimes we make the wrong choices. We can choose to believe that God is ultimately in control even though everything around us begs the question, ‘Where is God?’ Or we can choose to deny that, and say that it is all chance.

An ancient OT story tells of a wealthy religious man, Job, who lost nearly everything – including his children. While claiming personal innocence with God, he didn’t leave it there. He ‘argued the toss’ with God. I believe that God eventually blessed him because Job wrestled with the Almighty. When God finally confronted Job it was to call him to look at the big picture of the night-time sky with its stars and galaxies. Job then became meek – quieter and more gentle. He forgave those who had mocked him, worshipped his Maker for himself and then prayed for others in the spirit of forgiveness. The OT says that God blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the beginning.

I believe that it is possible to live again after we have embraced FORGIVENESS – no matter the tragedies that we have experienced. We are told by Jesus to forgive. He did not say forget. When we pray, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.’ Does that mean that we are forgiven when we forgive others? I believe that Jesus is saying that we need to be forgiving people and we, in turn, will find ourselves forgiven. I’d add – and healed from the bitterness that blaming others brings.

So where was God? Right in the middle of it all with us. That’s love and mystery combined. It is my fervent belief that God does not send bad things to anyone. We are all aware that both the fragile balance and power of nature are becoming clearer to us as science unravels the links of life. We can choose to work with nature, with each other and with God. So, where was God? **‘In the people who helped.’** And where is God now? With us and in each other.....that’s enough to make me dance with hope.

