

Seeing things differently

You felt the sense of relief that followed the announcement of the road map from the Prime Minister was palpable. People starting to see a bit of hope that there may be a normality about life by the summer. This is, of course, extremely welcome, and good news for all. What is also apparent is things will never be quite as they were before. Major events and periods of history change us inevitably.

That is a good thing though, of course, very often the events that lead to us seeing things differently are not necessarily a good thing - maybe a pandemic or a war. However, taking stock and having a fresh perspective is no bad thing. I could think of several ways in which my attitudes and opinions have changed over the years in the light of experience of listening to others views and quite honestly being open and prepared to be changed by that experience.

Here in my Chapel, I am surrounded by some very lovely bits of Christian art and iconography as well as the beauty of the countryside. In their own way each of them inspires me as I reflect upon the things of God. Yet one of my most recent acquisitions is very very powerful. It is a depiction of the Madonna and Child. Mary and Jesus are clearly depicted as Black Africans. The reality is for too many of us it is not how we are able to think of Mary and Jesus. Mary in her flowing blue robe and Jesus with the beaming cherubic smile. Both are depicted in this icon but of course the difference is that we do not usually think of Mary as an African village woman and Jesus as a black boy. Yet the incarnation means that Jesus is all things within humanity yesterday today and forever. Mary at the end of John's gospel is clearly presented to us as more than just the woman who gave birth to Jesus but as Jesus exchange from the cross between Mary and John, she is given as some representative figure for the church. In that sense she is more than just a Nazarene woman of a certain era and has a timeless quality which transcends ethnicity. Yet it is also important as I look upon this image, I see very clearly someone who looks like Mary. Yet it challenges me to see her in a slightly different way than the way that I was brought up to.

For too many of us in British society this is an experience we have not had. We are accustomed to only seeing things our way rather than being prepared to see things differently and value them for what they are. Some of you listening to this will not be a bit surprised by what I say. For many of you however like me you have had to learn to realise that the world does not just see things through our perspective

In the weeks and months ahead, we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord and the Incarnate One amongst us. As well as rejoicing in the fact that we can join again in worship in family and community so too I invite us to be prepared to see things differently. In seeing things differently just as this image encourages us so we see a world which needs to be changed; communities which need to be transformed as we say in our diocesan vision. Part of that change is being open to receiving images which inspire, encourage, and challenge us to see things differently so that we can truly celebrate the whole wonderful range and variety of human life around us in our world.

The image I mention moves me immensely because of the way in which it brings me closer to Jesus and an understanding of who his mother is. But it is also important because it reminds me to see things differently and value everything it is about the different perspective that others bring that through my experience of them and listening to them, I may be changed. I hope and pray that each of us can take that into the time beyond the pandemic.

Archdeacon David Picken

