

JOHN 16:5-16
REVEALING GOD

Where do we encounter God? How do we encounter God? That is one of life's big questions. This is what the Church has to offer to the world – the God question! On the surface, it appears as if our society has abandoned God, rejecting God almost totally. God doesn't seem to feature in the way people think; He seems to have no place in the way most people think about life and the way they live. Jesus' values seem to have no bearing on the way people shape their attitudes, their life and their behaviour. God is irrelevant! Some even poke fun at us when we talk about God and faith; they love to try to prick the bubble and try to show that any talk of God is just empty and pointless, "our imaginary friend". So does that mean that God has gone away? Where do we encounter God? How do we encounter God? Do we encounter God at all in our world? Or is the question just an empty question?

"Encounter" suggests more than just knowing stuff about God and Jesus. You can quote great screeds of the Bible without ever encountering the God of Bible! This is more than coming to Church and going through the process of worship. There is something about having the sense that *"the Lord is in this place!"* Or something about *"our hearts burning with in us"* when Jesus walked and talked with the people on the road to Emmaus. There is something about an encounter that changes our lives, the way we think, or feel, or behave! Perhaps there is something of "that Bible passage or sermon was just for me today" and it speaks to our situation and the way we feel at a particular time. It is the Spirit who makes these encounters happen; this is the Spirit at work in our world and more of these encounters go on than we realise: why do we decide to come through these front doors for a worship service on a Sunday? Because the Spirit inspires us and persuades us that worship is a good thing. Why does someone take a *Try Praying* booklet out of the box on the railings? Because the Spirit inspires them and persuades them that it will be worth their while!

We look at the mountains and see their grandeur and beauty and are moved by what we see and the Spirit prompts us to remember that the Bible tells us that creation reveals God's *"eternal power and divine nature"* (Romans 1:20) An encounter with God. We come to Church and sing a hymn and our heart soars with joy or passion as we sing great words about God or words that remind us how good and loving God is; the Spirit is at work to make these words live in our hearts. An encounter with God. We read the bible – Rom 5, say; *"God demonstrates..."* (Romans 5:8) and as we read, we are convinced that this is true not just in general, but this is true for me; I am the sinner and Jesus has died for me because God loves me! An encounter with God. Someone treats us well, loves us, cares for us, does something good for us and we are reminded that *"love comes from God"*; in being loved at one level that is much appreciated, we are reminded that God is love. An encounter with God. Faith is deepened, we are inspired to love and trust God a little more; our lives are changed and we are new people. It is the Spirit's job to make these encounters happen!

Jesus promised: *"When He..."* (John 16:13a) *"He will..."* (John 16:14) Jim Packer is a Christian writer and preacher who was at his peak in 1970's and 80's; he is still alive at the age of 92! He tells the story of going to preach these verses at an evening service in winter-time and as he turned the corner to go into the church, he saw that church was floodlit. He realised that this was exactly the picture he needed to add to his sermon. He described the Spirit's "floodlight" ministry on Jesus. When floodlighting is done well, you don't see the lights, but all you see is the glory of the building being floodlit; you see all its little nooks and crannies, you see something of the beauty of the stonework, your eye is drawn to the building rather than being drawn to the lights. Says Packer, that is exactly the ministry of the Spirit, drawing our eye to Jesus to see His beauty, His glory, His worth, so that we may love and trust Jesus.

"He will not..." (John 16:13b) *"by taking..."* (John 16:14) What do you admire most about Jesus? Is it something He did? Is it something He said? Is it some quality in Him? The Spirit's

job is to highlight what we see in Jesus. He doesn't work on His own; He has no agenda of His own, but all He does is entirely focussed on Jesus. The things Jesus did, or said, the qualities of His life - the Spirit's job is to draw our attention to these and inspire us to love and trust Jesus because He is worthy of our love and trust. We love and trust Jesus because the Spirit has inspired us to love and trust Him. We may be quite unaware of that; we may be totally unaware that the Spirit is at work in us and is behind all of this; that is the way the Spirit likes it because His job is not to draw attention to Himself, but is to draw our attention to Jesus.

These encounters are not always comfortable: "*When He...*" (*John 16:8*) I was speaking the other day with someone who has a friend who has just gone to be the minister of Barvas on the island of Lewis, the community that 60 years or so ago was the centre of the Lewis revival when many people became Christians and churches were filled with new believers and some sense of that still lingers, 60 years later. It is true that many people did come to faith, and were inspired to pray, but one of the other and the first features of the revival was a deep sense of being sinners, being convinced of guilt and a lack of faith and how deeply they had fallen away from God. People were reduced to tears by that conviction. Out of that, faith was born, a deep love for Jesus came along, but it so often started there, in being convinced of failure, guilt, and falling short.

Our encounters with God can leave us feeling uncomfortable for the same reason. These are two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, we realise how good Jesus is and on the other we see how far we have fallen. It is not always a happy place, to be reminded of our faults, mistakes and failures and sometimes we rebel against that, because to see our weaknesses leaves feeling a bit uncomfortable. But that is often the first step on the road to salvation because just as the Spirit convinces us of what we're like He then goes on to convince us of what Jesus is like. Go back to Romans 5: "*God demonstrates...*" (*Romans 5:8*) This is what God has done: we are loved, we are saved, we are forgiven, we have the hope of heaven, because Jesus died for us. We are sinners saved by the grace of God! An encounter with God that changes life and the way we see it forever.

The shop assistant who, when I walk into the shop on Good Friday, asks me what I think of hell because she has heard John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York on the radio talking about Jesus on the cross. Mum who is sitting in her car in the traffic queue on Lanark Road, stopped outside our building and she sees the banner for Messy Church; she brings her daughter on Saturday to take part in what we do, the play, crafts, and worship. The man at the bus stop watching me put up a poster, who picks up the bag of magnets when they fall off the wall and thanks me for putting up the poster that says "hope is here" because that's just what he needed to hear or read; he jumps on the bus and is off. I've already spoken about the 50 copies of the *TryPraying* booklet that have been taken from the box on our railings because people have wanted to read it, or try to pray, perhaps from a sense of need, or a sense that prayer and God might be able to help them.

All of these are stories of the Spirit at work in our place and there are lots more. Every one of us, here on a Sunday, is a story of the Spirit inspiring us to be here, persuading us that worship is a good thing. We can't control the Spirit and make Him dance to our tune; the Spirit is free to work in His way and some of these stories are great examples of the out-of-box ways in which the Spirit works, or the unlikely people in whom the Spirit works. Sometimes we have to run to catch up! So when people say that God is irrelevant and has gone away and people don't care anymore, while I can see why we'd think that is true, I can also see otherwise. The God question is still in people's hearts and the Spirit still inspires people to ask that question, still inspires us to have the courage to give answers! Pray for hearts and minds to be open to the Spirit's inspiration and prompting.

Most of all, the Spirit draws people to Jesus. His ministry is to show people how good and great Jesus is, to remind us of what Jesus has done for us, of how God loves us, of what

Jesus is like, and to draw us to faith. The Spirit inspires us to love and trust Jesus. When you come to Church, pray for the Spirit to inspire you in worship, in singing, listening, and praying. When you read the Bible, pray for the Spirit to help you understand what you read, to show you the place where what you read touches your life, or your world. When you've got a decision to make, pray for the Spirit to guide you, so that we learn to do what Jesus wants. When you meet other people, pray for the Spirit to help you love them, be kind, generous, and patient. So, He will draw us to Jesus; He will show us Jesus; He will inspire us to love and trust Jesus for that is what He came to do. "May the mind of Christ my Saviour, live in me from day to day..." – in a moment we will sing these words; will we sing them and mean them? The Spirit is at work in our hearts.