

Sunday October 25th 2015 at 6 pm.

Informal evening service: Any Questions/Ask it Basket

We last held an evening like this in March 2013 and I will repeat the disclaimer from that time.

'I have had to paraphrase some of the answers (no shorthand) so my hearing may differ from the intent of the speaker – please bear this in mind. I have also decided not to identify “who said what” to keep the flow going. It quickly became apparent that there isn't a single right answer either.'

As before, we started with some suitable songs (ably accompanied, as always, by Rena on a rather temperamental keyboard). Even though the numbers were small, the voices were big! This was followed by a prayer and the Lord's Prayer and then onto the questions.

The first question (which had been asked at the previous event – although worded a little differently) posed the following:

“Why does God (Allah) allow all the killing and suffering in the world today – particularly in the Middle East and Jerusalem where Christianity started - is religion at the root of our troubles?”

A: 'God should step in': Yes, he could but should He? Some things don't fit – there are limits to what makes sense. For example take the knife which can be used for cooking, hunting, shaving...and killing. If it was always turned to rubber, this would lead to distrust and losing of free will. The gift of free will brings responsibility.

Nowhere in Scripture does it say that God's followers will avoid suffering, instead God asked us to look after this world (and everything in it). Have to ask why we allow these things to happen. Originally God focussed on one group (see OT) but when things got really bad he sent Jesus to bring us all together.

Have to question whether faiths are really the root of many of the man-made wars or are people just using it as a badge. Unrest starts with small groups who hide behind a faith and it grows and becomes more about power, land, assets etc.

A counter to the above would be to find texts which give succour to people who want to commit violence – possibly in the OT – which is open to interpretation – but cannot be found in the NT.

“If God has no evil in him, how does He create things which do evil?”

A: God either created us as puppets or as possibilities, which means we can get it wrong. He didn't want evil but it comes back to the first question of free will.

We all have competing ideas about what is good and what our priorities are. This can sometimes allow bad and evil things to happen – unless we allow Jesus to walk alongside us, guiding us every step of the way.

“If we believe in the miracle of creation, why do some Christians struggle with other miracles?”

A: We need to take care when we describe things as miracles. Can sequences of apparently random coincidences which have a great end really be considered a miracle. What about the

survival against all odds of one person but not another – why would God enable one miracle and not another?

Miracles are things which are outside of the laws of nature – does this mean God messes with the world – which can get confused with scientific explanations.

Some of the theological objections include the belief that nobody could perform a miracle after the apostles – or should the New Testament perhaps be an ongoing story?

All were agreed firmly that God can perform miracles. Miracles in the Bible are recorded because they are a sign of what God is like. We must always hold in our minds how little we know of God.

“Beautiful as they are, how can Christians justify spending millions on restoring church buildings when there could be a better use for the money”

A: We could sell all the buildings and give the money raised to the poor – would that solve the issue?

Jesus said we would always have the poor amongst us (but this isn't a justification to ignore the problem). We do have a responsibility and shouldn't just leave the state to deal with the issue.

Tithing should provide more than enough to keep all our buildings going AND care for the poor.

If we lost our churches and cathedrals, we would lose the beacon in a community that points to God; but we are not using them properly – they should be place of worship and a community asset.

Why are we not giving as we should?

“Explain Luke 17:7-10 A Servant's Duty. Suppose one of you has a servant who is ploughing or looking after the sheep. When he comes in from the field, do you tell him to hurry along and eat his meal? Of course not! Instead, you say to him, ‘Get my supper ready, then put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may have your meal.’ The servant does not deserve thanks for obeying orders, does he? It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty.’”

A: Jesus' teaching told us that serving God is what we were created for. Jesus set us free to serve God. Not one of us can look God in the eye and say that we have done enough, so we shouldn't be looking for praise for doing God's work; it is incomplete. Even if we think we are doing enough, if the God or the church asks us to do more, we should do so willingly.