

The Heart of Belonging



The sun was shining brightly as some of my family and closest friend walked slowly through the beautiful grounds of Fountains Abbey at the weekend. A weekend that marked the start of Holy Week. As we ambled around, positions were changed and stories exchanged with a real fluidity – almost like a dance. I held back for a brief moment to watch this lovely scene and I suddenly felt a strong awareness of the beauty of what was occurring as well as a real flash of acknowledgement that this is where I am meant to be.....that 'I belong.

There are times when we all feel this sense of belonging-within our communities, families and places of work. It is something that draws us together and keeps us connected. On one level, it is very much about our external attachments to people, places and things. I am a

mum and a teacher and I belong here in my home and in my school. But I am learning that there is also a deeper truth and reality to belonging.

'Belonging is the living and passionate presence of the soul' John O'Donohue

Belonging is at the very heart of being human. I see it as a rich and deep calling which is there for us all, always and forever. This 'calling' is an invitation to journey into discovering who we really are and in doing so discovering the beauty of God and our place in the great mystery of it all. I am learning that this is not something elusive that we need to search for, 'out there' but something that happens right where we are. We are all people of flesh, just as Christ was, and his ultimate calling was for us to know and love God and ourselves and our neighbour. In other words - to belong - with real honesty and authenticity right where we are, wherever we are, whoever we are with.

Our whole lives are a journey into this precious discovery of belonging and each journey is a very unique and personal one. When we consider how best to take this journey we can look to Christ's journey into Jerusalem and learn from him. He travelled with humility and compassion and love. We can have no better guide than this.

Every possible emotion, from jubilation to utter despair is lived out in the Gospels of Holy Week and Easter. This is why they are important. Through them, Christ reveals to us how we can truly belong. We are human creatures of real light and beauty and God's desire for us is that we simply belong more fully to the lives that we are living. For us to know more fully that our relationships are the graced address of the incarnate God. Many find this hard to accept or to know how to do.

In his 1994 inaugural speech, Nelson Mandela said: ***'It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?' Actually, who are you NOT to be.'*** The light that Nelson Mandela is talking about here is the truest part of who we really are. Our God like selves.

We are here because we **belong**.

To God, with God, in God, of God.

Miracle of creation, of birth, of life, of love, of flesh, of bones.

Beauty of smiles, of sparkling eyes, of broken hearts and tear stained faces.

Yes the Gospels of Holy Week hold it all – the joy, the trauma and the brutality of Christ's final days of human life. Our story of belonging is right here too. It is in our humanness, in the very lives we are living now, that we encounter God's very real presence. We need look no further. And just as Jesus did, we are called, in our lives and in our communities, to journey humbly into the great mystery of Holy Week. Into the true mystery of our belonging.