

Darkness and light

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Isaiah 45:1-7

The prophet speaks to a people in exile, defeated and far from home. All around them are people worshipping the gods of Babylon, gods who have seemingly proved stronger and more reliable than the Lord, the God of Israel. The Jews are far away from Jerusalem, and from the Temple where they once went to meet and worship their God.

Why not settle down and adopt the local customs? No, says the prophet. They have to go home. And they have to hang on to faith in the only God who matters, the only God who is real. "I am the Lord, and there is no other," says God according to Isaiah. "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe." There is only one God in the universe, the source of everything that is, everything that happens: both weal and woe, both good and bad.

It is easy for us to credit God with the good things that happen. It is harder to keep faith in God when life is difficult and the world seems dark and cruel. It is easy to conclude that God is powerless in the face of evil forces rampant in the world. But Isaiah has the answer: God is the Lord, and there is no other. ☺



God of the universe, the only true God, we bow before you. Give us faith in difficult times, and trust when trusting is hard; that we may be your people and show forth your glory in the world. Amen.

Being a poet-in-residence

Faith in poetry

by Julia McGuinness

Part of my brief as poet-in-residence is to start a Faith in Poetry discussion group. Poetry evokes many responses, some inherited from schooldays, where it was often presented as a puzzle to be solved. But I have come to understand that reading a poem is like meeting a person. We may not understand them fully, but we remain open to deepening

our acquaintance. Subsequent encounters may highlight new facets of the same person, as we meet them afresh.

As we read poets from George Herbert to Mary Oliver and R. S. Thomas, we discover that, like people, we prefer the voices of some to others. Poetry invites us to read contemplatively. As we read each poem aloud more than once, often with different readers, we engage in a form of *lectio divina*, listening for the phrase that catches our attention, before exploring it further. Taking time with the written word is nurturing our capacity to approach the living word, not as a puzzle but as a mystery. ☺

Faith and mental health

by Katharine Smith

Katharine Smith concludes her series about mental health.

David has been ill for a year and struggles to cope with the turmoil going on in his mind. His church family has been very supportive and he and they are beginning to see light at the end of a long tunnel. What has he found most helpful in his recovery? He says the main thing is "respect for how I say I feel

and want or need... They have listened to what I say without judgement, without trying to change me or persuade me to think or feel anything that would not be true for me".

David's vicar offered a Eucharist for him and a few friends with the laying-on of hands for healing. David's birth certificate was on the altar during the service, symbolising God's unconditional love from before David's birth. "That was incredibly powerful for me," he says. "It was a very real experience which was witnessed by others who keep it real for me whenever I get wobbly again!" ☺

“ He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.”

Isaiah 40:29