



Lent Course St John's – The Church that Met in God's House

We based our discussions on themes suggested in *Let's be honest about our doubts*, a Lent Course by John Cox

The planned programme was to explore various aspects of doubt in the Old and New Testaments; doubts about God and Jesus; doubts about pain and suffering.

The aim was to talk honestly about the nature of our doubts, in the hope that the discussion and reflection would stimulate our faith, not undermine it.

Our meetings included worship, pair or small group discussions, silence and music.

But, of course, we only managed three sessions before being overcome by events.

The final session was planned to take place on the Monday of Holy Week and is offered here for members of the Lent Course, and others, who may well feel that these are testing times for all of us.

Be with us, Heavenly Father,
as we gather together in spirit,
and fill us with your love and hope.

Open our hearts and minds to your truth.
We thank you that in all our listening and speaking
we have shown respect for one another,
we have been honest and not judgmental.
May we continue to grow in faith and trust.
Amen

Jesus, Light of the World,
guide us and enlighten us.
Where there is darkness, shed your light.
Where there is ignorance, give us understanding.
Jesus, Light of the World,
guide us and enlighten us.

The Psalmist knows what it feels like for God to be very distant, hiding his face. The pain seems endless. But he comes through with a joyful and persistent trust.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me. *Psalm 13*

When we pray fervently, as the writer does in this psalm, there are times when God can feel very close. But at other times our prayers feel as if they are going into an emptiness. God may seem very far away, hidden in the darkness. It is then that we begin to doubt that God is there at all. When that happens, perhaps the best we can do is just put ourselves into God's hands and hang on with as much trust as we can muster.

No matter what we are going through, however many doubts we may have, the God we really want to believe in is a God of unfailing love, never giving up on us, however much we are tempted to give up on Him.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

***Heavenly Father, strengthen us in our faith;
hold us in our times of doubt; guide us in our searching;
and keep us in your love, today, tomorrow and always. Amen***