

8th March 2021

'Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.'

Genesis 18:5

Dear Friends,

Hospitality, and the sharing of bread, can be traced right back to the earliest traditions in the Biblical story and speak of how we meet with God when we share food with others. A radio advert has recently been reminding me of the way in which the words company and companion come from the Latin *com panis*, or *with bread*.

Last week, Chris and I were privileged to share bread¹, to have a meal, with a lovely couple from the local Jain community. Of course, in our weird Covid world, we weren't actually sharing the same food at the same table. We were sat in our own homes looking at each other over zoom. We each had a meal in front of us, but it wasn't the same one.

This meal was part of an interfaith series organised by the St Philips Centre encouraging these links between religious communities – even if the series of meals can only be virtual this year.

I am very confident that we learned more than they did: sadly, my knowledge of Jainism is almost non-existent. We learned about what foods they ate and didn't eat and about the times of day at which they were permitted to eat. We learned of the way in which these ideas are drawn from an emphasis on non-violence – toward all creatures.

We learned too of the emphasis on being content with having enough, of being satisfied with our possessions.

I would describe both of these priorities as being important within Christian faith too, but I am challenged because I don't think that most Christians take non-violence or contentment with possessions anywhere near as seriously as our new Jain friends.

We also spoke of the other St Philips Centre events which we have each been involved in, particularly in relation to schools work. Sometimes in those events it is important to emphasise the things which religious faiths have in common – to combat the narrative that all religious groups are permanently in conflict. At other times, it is essential that interfaith events are used to educate ourselves and others about difference.

We are currently in the season of Lent: a time of self-denial and reflection; a time to re-examine our faith and our priorities. I am prompted to reflect on my own commitment to non-violence and my own attitude to possessions, to reflect on the way in which I share my commitment to my Christian faith without denigrating the faith of others.

God bless you all – and stay safe

Rev Derek

¹ Actually, they had bread but we didn't. I don't know what that proves!