

Is it real?

These past few weeks I have received, sent and forwarded many images, Gif's, video clips and pictures that have been circulating on social media as we deal with the coronavirus and the consequences of social distancing and lock-down.

Some have been mind-blowingly complicated and professionally filmed others have a far more home -made quality about them.

Ranging from those which should be given a U certificate suitable for all, to those of an 18 rating, there has been a real mixture.

From ones that are just very silly, to those that manage to be both funny and profound at the same time, to others they are completely outrageous but full of truth nonetheless.

To be able to make us laugh and lift our spirits in difficult times is a gift that we gratefully receive and share.

My favourite so called 'religious' one is a simple cartoon drawing by Tim Wakeling.

It features a shot of a computer screen that is obviously in the midst of a Zoom meeting.

There are twelve boxes with participants in three rows of four each with the participants name. Matthew, James 1, John, Peter are on the top row. Below them you find Bartholomew, Andrew, Philip and Thaddeus. The bottom row's participants are Simon, James 2 & Thomas and a blank box

As well as the names of the participants, you see their faces.

Out of the blank box, the name Jesus can be seen with him saying "*Hey.*"

Simon's response is "*How on earth is he in the meeting*", whilst Thomas expresses his doubts by saying "*Unless he turns on his camera, I will not believe it*".

This simple yet poignant image has much to say to us, not least how it took something in particular for those Jesus met following his resurrection, to recognise him and believe.

For Mary, it was being called by name, for Thomas seeing the marks of the nails and the wound on his side, for those on the road to Emmaus, the breaking of the bread and for those out fishing the miraculous catch of fish.

I wonder how or what it is that for us makes the presence of the risen Christ an ever-present reality?

Tim's cartoon also has something to say to us about what is real and what it means for us to be a church in a digital way.

As you might imagine there is quite a lot being said at the moment regarding the nature of the so-called virtual church and worship, in other words, all that is being done and shared on-line and at a distance.

If you look up the definition of virtual you will find a number of responses such as “almost or nearly as described, but not completely or according to strict definition” and “not physically existing as such but made by software to appear to do so.”

So putting it bluntly, when we worship together on Sunday mornings at 10:30am for our Zoom service and not together in our church buildings, is that worship real?

Of course our Zoom worship is real and valid, we know that to be true because we have experienced it, engaged with it, felt it, connected with it, met God in it and been transformed by it.

It is genuine worship, albeit, done differently.

Perhaps the problem lies with the words we use and to call it ‘virtual’ diminishes its significance and raises questions about its integrity and authenticity.

So rather than talk about our virtual church or our virtual worship, I suggest we would be better off talking about us being the church on-line and offering on-line worship and services

When we had to vacate our church premises, it was stressed very strongly that although our buildings were closed, the church was still very much in business.

The church is alive and kicking in our homes, scattered within our communities, in the same way that those first Christians met and it is very much in business when we meet on-line - for we are not a virtual church, but a real, living, breathing and very much alive church that still seeks to engage fully with God’s people and God’s world.

So why not join us for real, on-line Zoom worship on Sunday at 10:30am. To find out more, send me an email or give me ring!