

Thought for the Day Monday 3rd July 2017

Good Morning

On Saturday Tom Stoppard told us, “every time I blink there’s a play begging to be written.” But then he confessed to having something like writer’s block. Because, he added, there’s “so much to write about (it’s) like having nothing to write about.” “The enormity” of everything that is happening at the moment is, to use his exact word, “emasculating”.

The interview he did to mark his 80th birthday which he celebrates today captures the mood of many conversations I’ve had recently.

People are feeling like rabbits caught in the headlights as one unpredictable event after another crash over us. So many of the certainties have vanished. The world seems to be reeling in the face of what another writer once called “Future Shock”. It’s not just the fact that everything’s changing, it’s the speed with which it’s all happening that leaves so many of us confounded.

One of the first pillars to be shaken came with the banking crisis. At the time, the bishops of the Church of England invited the political and constitutional historian Peter Hennessy to one of our meetings. I remember him saying that if there’s a battle between God and Mammon this was now the Church’s opportunity because by all accounts Mammon was well and truly on the ropes.

And it’s true that in a crisis people often reach out beyond materialism for some spiritual solace. But for those who turn to faith at a time of seismic change there are at least two ways of imagining how God meets us.

One is to find God in the institution of religion with its rites and rules; the other is to see God in the process of change itself. The problem with the first is that formal religion and its hierarchies are experiencing the same shocks as other institutions; the advantage of the second is that this is exactly how Jesus understood the way God works. In fact, he was often at odds with the institutions and described God's kingdom as a seed that keeps growing and changing. But not all change is good.

So how to discern where God is at work?

Look for the austere yet generous spirit that would bless the whole earth in wealth and health.

Or to put it in Tom Stoppard's own words:

"But to me the trick in life is to take that sense of generosity between kin, (and) make it apply to the extended family and to your neighbour, your village and beyond."

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE