

SERMON FOR GILLIAN COMINS MEMORIAL | 15.01.2020

With such literary excellence being shared this afternoon, tributes to Gillian's wide-ranging interests and experience, the last thing that is necessary now are words from a rambling Rector or even a verbose Vicar...

Because you will already have picked up some of the themes that link these readings together: the profound understanding of creation in St Matthew – God knows about every sparrow, every molecule, every activity under heaven – but especially he knows about each one of us; George Herbert's insight that God's love is boundless - it is we who draw back from him, never the other way round for *love bade me welcome ... and I did sit and eat*; Theodore the Studdite from the top of his pillar encouraging us not to flinch from the pain of gaining life experiences, for Christ has overcome the power of sin so we too can embrace immortality; and finally John Donne, one of the greatest Deans of St Paul's, painting this most amazing picture of heaven – *no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no end nor beginnings, but one equal eternity.*

It seems impossible to doubt the truths contained in any of these extraordinary pieces of literature. They are core parts of our cultural inheritance and our intellectual discourse.

But are they real? Are they more than words to us, however profound and familiar? Do we actually believe them in our heart of hearts or are they the words we say, the words we read when we are not sure; words we can trot out and still remain agnostic? Are we in John Wesley's camp: *preach faith until you have it*?

In these readings Gillian's invitation to us is to keep wrestling with the words, with the hopes and with the man Jesus around whom all these ideas are centred. Indeed, she hadn't come to the end of that faith journey herself and she still had many questions left unanswered. But at the deepest level she knew and it is the way that she struggled with faith – and with ideas in so many directions - that made her such a delight and such a wonderful person to know.

Words, however good, are never enough. It is the heart that knows best, and the heart where the love of God is easiest found.