

Thinking Allowed 2018

The Thinking Allowed Group meets each month at 10.15 am on the first Thursday. Our aim is to think and question honestly, supporting and accepting each other. So, we are 'allowed' but we also do so *aloud*, together, in an atmosphere of trust and utmost respect.

Each December we review the current year and plan for the next. For 2018 we've had the theme: 'Living As If...'

How would it be if we gave up trying to believe things that, honestly, we can't accept? Instead, could we accept things provisionally, only 'as if' they were true, whilst still learning and being nurtured by them.

We started with James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*. We could easily relate them to our own lives. Doubt and questioning are right there, somewhere around stages 4 – 5.

At Gretta Vosper's church in Toronto only inclusive, non-religious language is used, meaningful to everyday life. She is concerned that dogmatic language might leave questioners stuck in anger, feeling excluded. *Time Or Too Late* was the book that inspired this session.

Reading Mark's gospel 'as if' it were a novel, strangely, it came alive. We saw how story and metaphor help us to create meaning in our lives, just as Jesus created meaning with his parables. We talked about new ways of understanding forgiveness and resurrection.

We explored language and meaning further. Both everyday talk and trying to express the inexpressible often use allusion, metaphor and myth. We create language, but language also creates us. Jesus was a master of this in his parables.

In May, as the Vatican tried to downplay the Pope's reported denial of the existence of hell, we considered 'what if the Pope were not misquoted...?' and, with Neil Johnson's help, we explored the dilemmas faced by religion in the modern world. Are we finding ourselves in a different kind of hell?

Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* is a compassionate consideration of the existential doubts and fears that people face. It challenges us to live with doubt as part of life and faith, accepting uncertainties and mysteries, crystallised in what Keats called 'negative capability'.

Richard Holloway's *Waiting for the Last Bus* looks at how we might live this towards the end of life, being open to what might be and forgiving ourselves for our failings. A thoughtful read.

Finally, we discussed 'The Baby and the Bath Water'. This proved a fertile metaphor that helped us reflect on what matters, what doesn't, and what might help us to live more truthfully, lovingly and fully.

If this kind of discussion interests you, please join us.

Pat Bailey 01.11.18