

Mike's message

What do you believe?

I know it may seem a strange question but, "What do you believe?". I don't mean "what do you think you should believe? But what do you actually believe?

Sometimes the Church (and I mean the Church in it's widest sense, not just The Cotteridge Church) gives the impression that, if you going to belong, you must believe in a whole range of statements. You can be assured that, when you stand in church on a Sunday morning, and we say the prayers and sing the hymns there will be others, like you, that are thinking, "Really?" Or, "Do I believe that?".

As individuals we shouldn't be made to believe but here are religious groups that do precisely that. The mainstream churches would refer to them as cults. Cults manipulate their followers almost by "brainwashing". How then do we compare and cope with belief?

We need to think of belief as personal. An individual's belief - your belief, my belief - is only part of the wider belief of the Church. That's why, when we stand together as a church congregation, we can say certain things together. It's the collective belief of the Church, and individual members may have certain differences in the detail of that belief. It's a little like politics. Yes really! In politics a particular group, such as the Cabinet, may have individual opinions but they need to act together. It doesn't mean that those individual opinions are invalid or less important. If they are sincerely held, they are sincerely held. The same goes with what we believe, or don't believe.

Belief also changes throughout our lives. Every experience that we have can adapt, change, mould or in other ways influence our belief. Part of our belief system is faith. I suppose if I had to explain the differences between belief and faith I would say that belief is the way we put things into words, faith is the feeling we get when we think about it.

Another question. What is the opposite of faith or belief?

The usual answer that you get when you ask that question is that the opposite of faith is doubt. I disagree with that. In fact I'd go so far as to say that the opposite of faith is certainty! I believe faith (and belief) is a journey of exploration. If we are certain of something we stop looking. In regards to our faith it is only right, and very necessary, that we think, explore, develop, test and experiment with what we believe. In that religion and science share common ground. There is always something new to explore.

We'll be running some sessions during the winter to discuss what we believe; about Jesus, God, the Church, Creation, Suffering ... You name it and we'll discuss it! Look out for details and come and explore with us. For those that want it to this will form the preparation for our Membership and Confirmation Service on Sunday 3rd February 2019.

