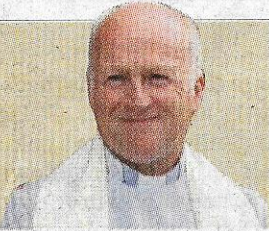


Why so much suffering?

● "How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault.."

by Bill
Boyce



THE ANGLICAN CHAPLAIN FROM PUERTO POLLENSA

IN 2015 Stephen Fry, the comedian and broadcaster, was asked in an interview what he'd say to God were he to meet him at the pearly gates.

He replied: "I'd say, bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you?"

"How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault.

"It's not right, it's utterly, utterly evil.

"Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain. ...

"The god that created this universe, if it was created by god, is quite clearly a maniac... utter maniac, totally selfish."

This interview went viral and in it Fry expressed one of the main objections that people have to belief in God – there is simply too much suffering in this world to believe that it was created by a benevolent, all-powerful God.

Such a God who stands distant from the world he created, watches on while we all

suffer and expects our devotion or threatens us with hell if we don't comply is one that he rejects out of hand, as stupid, mean-minded, and maniacal.

Stephen Fry echoes the question of many who are atheists, 'Why respect a God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain?'

He asks a good question, doesn't he?

It's an issue that I'm sure all of us have wrestled with in some way or another.

People were wrestling with it in Luke's gospel.

That there is so much injustice and pain in this world is abundantly clear.

The suffering of innocents through bone cancer, ebola and other terrible diseases, starvation, child abuse – is unfair and horrific.

The suffering in war zones throughout the world, those prominent in news reports, such as Ukraine, and those that rumble on mostly unnoticed, Yemen, Ethiopia, the list goes on.

How can we possibly defend a God who stands idly by while we suffer?

You know what?

We shouldn't.

Such a God is not worth our worship.

And that's not the God that Christians worship.

Stephen Fry protests at unjust suffering,

but the Bible is also soaked with protestations ...

David, in the Psalms laments, "'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry out by day but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.'

Perhaps you can relate to the pain that's expressed here.

Perhaps you can relate to the experience of suffering that seems so unfair.

And the only reasonable answer is..... why?

How can you reconcile belief in a supposedly good all-powerful God when so much of life is horrific for so many people?

If Christians don't believe in the kind of God that Stephen Fry describes, what kind of God do we believe in?

Well, we believe in the kind of God who looks like Jesus.

If we want to know what God is like, we need to look at Jesus. The Bible is quite clear – Jesus is God.

In John 1, we read,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

Paul expresses something very similar, - "The Son is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

The message of the New Testament is clear. If you want to know what God is like, then look at Jesus.

So, if Jesus is who he, and the New Testament writers claimed him to be, then God has to be like him.

This, not the selfish maniac that Stephen Fry spoke of, is the God we worship – a God of unparalleled compassion and love. Jesus is the mirror image of God.

So what went wrong?

Much of the suffering we see is man-made.

We often point to the acts of war, in Ukraine, in the Yemen, and rightly shake our heads, but in truth, we're each culpable.

We each make our own choices. In our hearts, we are king, our instinct is to look after number one, and if anyone else gets in the way of our self-interest, then they better face the consequences.

Stephen Fry assumes that God deliberately created a universe with appalling undeserved suffering.

But a central doctrine of the Christian faith is that God created a good and perfect world and after the fall of humanity nothing is fully as it should be.

To blame God for natural disasters and childhood cancer is like blaming the landlord after tenants have trashed their house.