

God of surprises



Gillian Cooper *reflects on Acts 3:12-19*

You Israelites": so Peter addresses the crowd who have gathered near the Temple, drawn by the news of a miraculous healing. Peter's message is theological dynamite. He speaks of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God his audience have known as their God, the one true God. And he asserts that Jesus, who was executed as a criminal, rejected by his own people and condemned by the Romans, was this God's anointed one, the long-awaited Messiah.

Little wonder that this message gets Peter and his friends arrested. The Jews' very existence depends on their rigid adherence to their faith in the midst of the ruling pagans. They know that the Messiah will be a human ruler through whom God will defeat the Romans, not some criminal who seems still to be performing miracles after his death.

But there is a pattern to be seen, says Peter, looking back through the ancient scriptures. The prophets spoke of suffering as well as glory for the Messiah. Jesus is a surprise. And yet Jesus represents just what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would do, that God who constantly surprises, the God who chose the family of undeserving Abraham, and the conniving younger son Jacob to form a people so long ago. It is, like so much of what God did then and continues to do, both unexpected and consistent. 😊

The Church Fathers

Part 4, Tertullian

by Richard Gunning

Richard Gunning continues our look at some of the early Church Fathers.

Of all the early Fathers, Tertullian (c. 160-225) was probably the most fierce and uncompromising. Hailing from Carthage in Africa, he was a prolific author and the first Christian writer to produce an extensive body of Latin Christian literature. He originated new theological concepts and developed early church doctrine. He is perhaps most famous for

being the first writer in Latin known to use the term "Trinity".

A strict disciplinarian, ascetic and misogynist, he wrote that fornicators should not be forgiven and women should conform to St Paul's teaching and know their place. Most significantly, in his teaching on the Trinity, he claimed that the Son was subordinate to the Father.

Tertullian was never martyred and, because of his extreme views and occasional heresy, he fell away from the Church and has never been called a saint. 😊

God of surprises, give us understanding to discern your work in the world; that we may play our part in your plan of salvation, and come finally to our place in the everlasting kingdom which you have prepared from the beginning of time. Amen.

Walking with Poppy

Goodbye for now

by Gillian Cooper

The vet is kind. She places Poppy gently on my lap, and asks me if I am ready. I tell Poppy she is going to have a lovely sleep. When the drug goes in, she turns her head and looks straight at me, in surprise, not accusation, I hope. I say to her the words my late partner and I so often used in our games with her: "Poppy, go find Mummy". I leave by the back door, alone.

Before I go to bed, I go into the garden as we have always done, as I will continue to do every night. Is there a place for dogs in whatever God has prepared for us after death? Jesus showed his friends that life and love triumph over death, and joy does not end. So I look up at the night sky, and I pray that somehow, somewhere, Poppy and her other mummy have found each other, and are waiting for me. 😊

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13