

BIBLE SUNDAY 2022

The Scripture Union sent me an e-mail message last week in good time for today! It had a tempting, media-like headline: “Shining bright this Halloween.”

‘Hello Nigel’ – very familiar – “With an estimated 95% of children in England & Wales not part of a church, we’re working harder than ever to take the good news of Jesus beyond the church in exciting and culturally relevant ways”

At this point I was thinking ‘they are about to sell me something’ especially when we read on, “making sure that you are equipped and supported in a way that makes sense for you and your context!” And then comes the punchline:

“If you missed out on our schools training in September then fear not, we have great news for you! This November we’ll be running another in- person ‘Introduction to Schools Ministry Training’ session...”

From the two lovely pictures inside your pew sheet, there was great excitement because every year, this St Mary’s gives Year 6 at St Mary’s Primary, a colourful ‘Rainbow Bible’ to find their way around in their final year before they take them home to keep. In the assembly I asked if any of the children liked poetry, history, geography, and if any of them liked writing letters (that was harder because our digital age thinks letters are long gone, unless of course, you resign from government office – which still seems very popular in letter form!). Across 66 books of the Bible, I tried to present both parts, the Old and New Testaments as one huge library to

explore, travelling different centuries and cultures, and certainly not to be read from beginning to end like a John le Carré novel. We can only cope with small chunks at a time which is why we have a lectionary for our readings at church. As you know, some excerpts are difficult to digest (let alone for children) and the poor preacher sometimes thinks ‘how can I make this or that passage’ come alive or, ‘how can I seek out truths that, at first glance, seem to be hiding’?

St Paul answered that for us in our first reading, in his own inimitable way: “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” Despite all the many ups and downs of Paul’s travels he did have that Billy Graham-like, missionary zeal – taking and testing the Scriptures out in front of large and different audiences, even risking his own life to do so. This is in stark contrast to the setting, last week, of the widow worshipping quietly and attentively in the Temple. Perhaps it takes years, a lifetime in fact, to let the active Word of God literally inhabit our hearts and minds and souls. There is no quick fix.

In today’s self-fulfilling prophecy of the Gospel, when Jesus is centre stage unrolling the scroll to reveal Isaiah’s hope and prayer for the world, Jesus effectively says loud and clear, ‘I am that hope and prayer, in your midst.’

I will bring good news to the poor, to the schoolchildren, to whoever and wherever our experience of God or knowledge of God is lacking or missing altogether. But this will not

happen without risk or challenge. We are warned that ‘no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town.’ And in our own times when the voices of prophecy are so often dismissed as ‘fake news’, we still urgently need the Good News of the Gospel. We still need to hear God’s still voice speaking to us in public as well as private spaces.

As you know, we hold the Gospel up high into the middle of the nave; we symbolically turn towards it to hear the proclamation Jesus is still calling. And at the end of our Eucharist, we are sent out to live that Good News for the week ahead, amidst everyone we meet, whatever their age.

The Church is a people and not just a building; it is a ‘movement’ which lives and breathes by the Word of God: for guidance, for direction, for support. But the Bible must be treated with care and sensitivity. As we each seek to both interpret it and be inspired by it, let’s never forget that initial excitement when we received our Bibles for the first time, as children? The treasures to be found within never cease to sparkle. Next Sunday they will be “shining bright for All the Saints”.

In the name...