

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Bible Readings: Psalm 119:1-16

Luke 4:1-13

Date: 11 October 2015

As I hope you know by now, we are making our way through a short series of sermons looking afresh at our vision – to live by faith, to be known by love, to be a voice of hope.

Last time (the week before Harvest) we looked with Sue at prayer as an expression of or aspect of our life as those who live by faith.

Today we are thinking about the Bible as another important resource for us to help us to live as people of faith. Someone has said that Christians are in a really fundamental sense “people of the book”.

Of course, everyone looks somewhere for their guidance and their wisdom. If you are following the developments in Bracknell you will know that their new shopping centre is called The Lexicon. And their strap line is “Life as it should be”. Although this might be amusing it speaks volumes about how contemporary society sees the world we live in and how it tries to make sense of it through shopping and experience.

Someone has said that Christians are in a really fundamental sense “people of the book”. Not people of the shop nor people of the experience.

Originally written in other languages of course, the bible is today available to us in English, in so many, many different versions: in written form, on CD, on the web and in apps. So that these days we can see the words of scripture in the palm of our hand, rather than have to reach up to get a book down from the shelf.

The Bible is there for us in a way never before imagined in history. It is an amazing and wonderful resource for living. It helps us to make sense of the world in which we live by giving us a biblical world-view. It helps us to make sense of life’s conundrums and of those many things we come across which seem puzzling. It offers answers to some of life’s hardest questions. It helps us to get to know God himself.

If you were with us last week for Harvest you would have seen a ppt slide letting you know the good news that we had been teaching some of the children at HT School about the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We had said to them that the Bible isn’t like a text book and doesn’t set out in chapter 23 or 33 or wherever it is to explain exactly how the Trinity works. Rather, we discover the work of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the different episodes and stories in the writings of scripture as a whole.

We explained to the children that in the pages of the Bible we meet God as Father, the creator and sustainer of the world; we meet God as Son, who lived to show us how to live and who died for our sins to bring us forgiveness and back into relationship with God; we meet God as Holy Spirit, who came from God when Jesus returned to him in

heaven to live inside us and to be with us for ever and for always.

With the children, we used the illustration of a Mars Bar: we asked the children to describe one without using the words Mars or Bar. We discovered that it was chocolate, nougat and caramel and that without any one of those three ingredients it just wasn't a Mars. It might have been a Milky Way or with peanuts it might be a Snickers ... but with just those three ingredients it was only ever going to be a Mars Bar.

In just the same way, God the Holy Trinity is only ever going to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Bible is a book to look to when we need him to help us to work out and to know what it means to be people of faith, people who work, rest and play.

Let me explain ...

John Stott, one of the finest of the popular biblical scholars, a vicar in central London for many years, says this:

'In so far as the Bible is a human book, we read it as we would any other book, with our minds; but in so far as it is the word of God, we read it as we would read no other book, on our knees.'

Someone else has said:

"The teaching of the Bible is our guidebook for living. Its doctrines have inescapable implications, the ethical instruction that flows from them. That ethical instruction is

inevitably embedded in the cultures into which it was given, but the principles it embodies are for all time and all cultures."

So let's see what the Bible has to say about our living by faith, about our work, our rest and our play as we seek to live it out ...

Work

Genesis makes it clear that we were made to work. God gave Adam some jobs to do which initially related to looking after the world God had made. There was something about the bodies God had given his first people which made them fit for working ... hands and feet, minds, heads and hearts.

- Hands and feet to do physical things
- Minds to think
- Heads to be wise
- Hearts to show compassion

Manual labour, the academy, leaders and carers all find their origins in the way God wires the whole thing up from the very beginning.

We are not meant to sit about doing nothing. We are not meant to not play our part, to not do our bit, to not get involved. Work is a part of the pattern of things from the very start, with appropriate remuneration and responsibility at different levels. And that's why **unemployment** is such a problem for human beings who were made to work not made to sign on.

Now before you start to think this is beginning to sound like a political party speech, we simply need to note that the world of the everyday for so many people in our country today is rooted in the way God made them and the gifts and resources he has given them.

We were made to work, to be productive, to achieve stuff, and do stuff, to make a difference by what we could do with our hands and feet, minds, heads and hearts.

There are two further aspects to this working business ... how we do it and what we do when we do it as people who live by faith:

How?

We are to work as if we were working for God himself – whether we're in the factory, the office, the classroom, the courtroom or the operating theatre.

We are to have a sense of God's presence with us in the routine, in the decisions we make which affect others, in the managing of money and resources and in the handling of people well.

Our responsibilities at work are given to us by God himself and we can undertake them carelessly or thoughtfully for him.

If that's the how, what about the What?

What?

There may be some things we have issues about. Things the boss has asked us to do which are questionable morally. This may be to do with money or the use of valuable resources. It may be to do with being away from home, being away from our husband or wife or our children too much. It may be to do with the office gossip or the general bullying that goes on so very often in the workplace.

How we conduct ourselves here (in a very public arena) is a really important indicator of where we are with God as someone who lives by faith.

We trust God for things. We love and respect his people who may be our colleagues. And we try to do the job we are given and paid to do to the very best of our ability.

Someone has said this: *Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the word he preached was actually 'the word of God, which is at work in you who believe' (1 Thessalonians 2:13). So we must expect God to speak to us, to work in us, even as we study. We must allow God's word to challenge, encourage, convict, guide and change us ... when we work.*

But also when we rest. How can we be people who live by faith when we are resting?

Rest

Someone has said:

“Principles of interpreting the Bible are, perhaps, the equivalent of the proper use of the operating manual.

Reading and studying the Bible is a uniquely satisfying experience. Engaging not only the mind but also the heart, it speaks, from God, into our world and into our individual lives”.

Amazingly perhaps and excitingly also, the Bible has some things to say about the times we are not working; the times when we are resting ...

Of course, this begs the first question: are we good about time off or are we always at work? The Protestant work ethic of our history and the current crazy working patterns of many in this country make you wonder!

Another question would be: are we able to be free of the devices, the phones, the tablets and the laptops? Or are we slaves to them? Have they become our masters now?

Are we good about time with the family, keeping in touch with those nearest and dearest to us? I know my Dad would tell you, I could phone him up more often. I know he’s got my phone number too but ... I could take the initiative maybe more than I do in my already busy schedule.

Are we OK about holidays? Are we able to switch off properly? Are we able to say no to the demands of the office – how many times do I hear “I’m just checking my e-mails”. I do wonder sometimes what we checked before

there were e-mails to check? I am sure there must have been something!

The Bible teaches us that rest is important ... after 6 days of creating, God rested on the seventh day. I know there is a movement around to increase the hours of permitted Sunday trading ... This seems to me to be another potential nail in the coffin for those who want to feel OK about resting. Surely this is something Christians in the market place could have something to say about? I feel another letter to our local MP coming on!

Work, Rest and finally, how are we able to be people of faith in our play?

Play

For my birthday this year, I was bought a Fitbit – most of the time it sits on my wrist. It marks out and counts up the steps I take and gives me a daily total. It’s linked with Kathryn’s and with Sue’s so that we can track each other’s progress. At first it felt a bit like close circuit TV so they would know where I was and what I was up to ... but it has been very helpful in encouraging me to be more active and “to keep my steps up.”

Sue and I had a very funny visit this week. We went to see a family we have been to see on a number of occasions and of course as the children have been growing so they have become more active. They were fascinated by Sue’s fitbit and wanted to try it on. It’s amazing how many steps you can get up to as the children with their little steps whizz around the dining table and the owner of the fitbit

just sits on the carpet and laughs! When I suggested that this might possibly be called cheating, I was told it was a wonderful example of delegation!!

People do all kinds of things to play – they walk, run, go to the gym, play sports, play music, sew, knit, travel, read, watch films, go to the theatre, fish, shoot, sunbathe, ski. The list goes on and on and on.

The question is how do we do any of these things in a Christian way as those who live by faith?

I want to offer two observations or ask two questions:

- a. If we do this thing alone, could we invite others in? Could we share the joy? Share the fun? Share the experience?
- b. If we do this thing as family, could we invite someone else or even another whole family to join us?

I think that play is or could be one of the most important parts of what it means to live by faith ... both working and resting are more about us as individuals rather than as church; and they have little to do with choice. We have to work. We need to rest. But we can choose to play, we can choose how to play and we can choose who we play with.

For a community to live by faith there must be relationship and the building of relationships. Church is more than the sum of the total of the individuals that make it up.

That's why one of the things we are trying to do here at HTS is to be building relationships intentionally little by little, bit by bit, hanging out, doing stuff together.

It's not rocket science, but you can only build relationships by spending time with the other person. Relationships are not built in a quick fix kind of a way – they take time, they take energy and they take commitment and intention. They don't just happen.

And sometimes, it's not the big organized event, it's not the dinner party that takes weeks to prepare for, it's not the whatever thing that we feel we need to dress up for and be on our best behavior for .. it's about a simple coffee, a simply meal, a walk in the park, a ride out in the car.

This is not rocket science but it is one way we can be people who live by faith and are known for that in our community.

Having said all this about living by faith in our work, rest and play having said all this about building relationships, I want to end by reminding us that this our foundation is not just some wise words from "Good Housekeeping" or "Cosmopolitan" – excellent though those publications obviously are!

There is something here about taking time, making the effort, taking the trouble to spend time with the God who makes himself available to us and makes himself known to us in the pages of the Bible.

Whether it's a proper book, an e-book, a CD or a Bible in a year kind of an app, we can have this treasure in our hands each and every day. We can be shaped by the God we read about there. We can begin to think more with his thoughts, see things through his eyes, weep for the state of the world with his tears and be his hands and feet, his mind, his head and his heart for the sake of those who desperately need to find him.

Friends, let's pray together that we will be people of the book: people who want to know God better and love him more and serve him effectively. That's who he calls us to be and it's what he calls us to do. It's not an optional extra for those who like that kind of thing. It's his fundamental way of engaging with us, of drawing us into his family, and of giving us greater confidence in being the people in this place who live by faith, in our work, our rest and our play.

Let's pray ...