

2024-08-04 ... 6.30pm Evening sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Job 28; Hebrews 11: 17-31

What does your story to faith look like?

Mine begins with Sunday School at Ruislip Methodist Church – it was a happy place for me.

Then with an awareness of a small group of peers at secondary school who had something different and good going on in how they were.

Then a group of friends at uni who made Sunday a day of rest and hosted tea parties.

Of course, since being properly connected with the church I have met many people who have contributed positively to my faith journey.

There have been people I only know through books like Corrie Ten Boom and Dr Ida a doctor in India.

It can be easier to relate to God through the lives of others than through Jesus who can seem too impossible to be like, almost too good to be true, and through the lives of our peers or near contemporaries than those we meet in the scriptures. The belief of others showing in their lives helps our own belief in our belief!

Perhaps you have favourites in the bible stories, I became deeply impressed with Mary when I was preparing a sermon based on her; sometimes it is the imagination of others which highlights the qualities of one of the characters – I'm thinking of Phoebe, a minor character in Acts, as imagined by Paula Gooder – and brings them to life.

The experiences of others, and the way they conduct themselves opens up possibilities to us of how we might reflect God's commandments in our own lives.

I'm not sure if it is reassuring or not, that it is our lives and the stories we can tell about them that have more impact on our contemporaries than our ability to quote bible references!

But we can't live our lives through others.

It is our own relationship with God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that will give us the confidence to say that God is Good and that God's promises are true.

It is a bit surprising that our reading stops where it does because by reciting this list in Hebrews, it is another difference that the writer is stressing. The scriptural greats that were known to the early Christians were of course of the Jewish faith, and revere those characters as you may, perhaps because of rather than in spite of, their flawed lives, because they lived before Christ, they did not know the saving grace that it is our privilege to be able to claim. Their faithfulness can be an inspiration to us, a witness to God's presence in and impact on the world, but they were faithful in the expectation of a lesser reward than we who are blessed to come after Jesus's resurrection.

And the passage from Job which is something of a diversion from the rest of the dialogue of the book, also speaks of the impact that a relationship with God brings – because only God who can see the whole of existence in one view understands where wisdom comes from and where it can be found. And the direction we get at the end of that chapter is that wisdom comes from fearing God – fearing God meaning to be awed by, to respect and to endeavour to live by God's standards – and rejecting evil.

We fall in the ongoing story of God – we learn, we practise, and so inevitably we share and teach. Just as we needed others, others need us – let's try and make the best job of it that we can.