



Mountain and Sea

A periodic newsletter of the Anglican Parish of Caloundra-
Glasshouse Country

St Andrew's Caloundra
Mary McKillop Centre Beerwah
St Thomas' Mooloolah

Issue #1, 29 August 2021

Welcome to our new parish newsletter. This publication has come about because of revisions to our parish Pew Bulletin. We intend and hope to publish "Mountain and Sea" fortnightly, and it will comprise information about events and life within the parish, as well as articles of a theological or informative nature, and some more light-hearted material. We hope that you enjoy it, and will find it both instructive and diverting. Please direct any comments or complaints to the locum priest, Fr Michael.

Forthcoming Parish Events

September

5th Father's Day

11th Mooloolah Markets

13th Registrations close for the Junior Ichtus Camp

October

10th Archbishop Phillip Aspinall's visit. Archbishop Phillip will celebrate the Eucharist at St Andrew's at 8AM.

November

5th Trivia night - 7pm

21st Bishop Jeremy's visit

26th Northern Region Lay Retreat

December

4th Mooloolah Markets

19th Carols & Lessons

Other regular, recurring meetings include:

"Prayers & Squares" - 1st Tuesday 1pm

Mothers' Union - 2nd Tuesday 10am

Anglican Frenz - 3rd Tuesday 2pm

Social Committee - 3rd Wednesday 2pm

Compassionate Friends - 3rd Saturday 9.30am

Bible Study Groups - Monday mornings & Thursday Evenings -
Caloundra area & Monday Evenings GHC area (fortnightly)

Choir - 3pm Friday afternoons (except school vacation)

Morning Prayer on Zoom - 8am each morning except Sundays



This illustration first appeared in “Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot” in 1919, at the height of the Spanish flu pandemic.

I often comment on the use and understanding of the Bible from the pulpit, so I have written the following about a possible approach to reading, comprehending and using the Bible for contemporary Anglicans.

While I believe that everything contained in this text is supported and informed by current scholarship and

is in accordance with Anglican liturgical and theological theory and practice, it is nevertheless my own personal appreciation and apprehension of Holy Scripture. Please read and use it as you find

appropriate and and helpful.

(A short bibliography is appended)

A Personal Anglican Approach to the Bible

On the first Easter day, two of Jesus disciples were walking sadly away from Jerusalem convinced that the law their loved was dead and buried. As they walked, Jesus approached them and walked with them, but they were so convinced he was dead that they failed to recognise him. So he talked with them about their recent experiences as they walked on and “opened the Scriptures” to them to explain how all that they had experienced was necessary in God’s plan. Toward the end of the day the disciples persuaded Jesus stop with them and share a meal. As they did so, he took a loaf of bread, gave thanks to God, and broke the bread. Then they recognised that their companion was Jesus (Luke 24:13-35).

This story told by St Luke should be familiar to Anglicans not simply as a story but as their own experience. In our Christian journey, the Scriptures are of critical importance as a means of understanding God's nature and purpose; as you read and study them, Jesus walks with us and we grow in knowledge. And then, when we gather for a simple meal, we know Jesus’ presence with us in the breaking of the bread. Word and sacraments are the means by which God works in our lives to enlighten us and to be present with us.

Suppose you came to service in our church for the first time. What would your impression be? Put aside if you can, all of the ceremonies you saw and just think about the words of the service. Would it strike you that it was remarkable how much of the service was simply words recited from the Bible?

To begin with, there are usually four passages of Scripture read at our Sunday Eucharist, three lessons and a psalm. These lessons are selected according to the lectionary, a plan we use so that in a three-year cycle almost all of the New Testament and a great deal of the

Old Testament are read, and if we were to say the daily offices of morning and evening prayer practically all of the Bible would be read. If Anglicans attend services every Sunday and follow the sequence of daily readings, few other Christians could claim as rich and full an exposure to the Bible as they will have. No other church over the last four and a half centuries has regularly given its members so much of the Bible in their own vernacular language.

Perhaps you would also notice during the service that the hymns, the anthems sung by the choir and the prayers are all based on scripture. You would notice the story of the Last Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-25), for example, in the middle of the Prayer of Consecration and the song of Isaiah and St John both heard sung by angels, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4: 8), at the beginning of that same prayer. There are many references in the opening prayer, the Collect for Purity, to Matthew 6:6, John 16:8, John 16:13 and Romans 8: 26-27. So too, the blessing most often used at the end of the service, "The Peace of God which passes all understanding..." is based on Philippians 4:7. The Eucharistic service is saturated with this kind of biblical reference. One third of our Prayer Book is either a book of the Bible (the Psalms) or a guide to reading the Bible; The rest of the Prayer Book is based on the Bible and makes constant reference to it. The services contained in the APBA are a way of turning the Bible into prayer. This is much less likely to happen in informal or spontaneous prayer since few people are so thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures that the right phrases for prayer come instinctively to their lips.

The life of the Anglican Church is centred in worship, but that is not to say that the Anglican Church is not deeply centred on the Bible. It is the Bible that forms and shapes our worship. The Bible in worship is not so much a book of instruction, nor simply God's word to us, but it becomes a language that we learn with which we speak to God.

It is important, again, to notice that Anglicans hear the Bible most often in church in the company of other Christians. The effect of

that hearing is very different from what happens when we read the Bible alone in our homes. We should, of course, do that also, but we begin the week by hearing the Bible in worship and in company with others. That should always be the place we start. Hearing the Bible first within the worshipping community has several consequences.

First we are reminded of the limitations of all language. “What shall I say, my God, my holy joy?” asked one of the saints. What words are adequate to express either our needs or God’s unlimited glory? But worship enables us to go beyond language. We cannot find words adequate for God's glory, but we can sing and bow our heads and “present... ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice” (APBA, based on Romans 12:1). In worship we come to know God in a way beyond words. All words, even those of the Bible, are inadequate to express the fullness of God’s love, power and glory. The words of the Bible, then, can be seen as a reflection of what we have experienced more directly in worship. When the Bible says, “Who is so great a God as our God?” (Psalm 77:13), we know what it means because we have been involved in worship.

Second, we are reminded of the limitations of our own individual understanding. Everyone else in church will hear the words of the Bible from a different perspective from mine, that they will therefore hear different things than I will hear. It is appropriate that each of us should hear something different, but it is more important for me to remember that what I hear is not the whole message or the only message. In my own room, I might come to believe that; in a group Bible study and in church, I am much less likely to see it that way. Because of our limitations, there is a danger that an individual could misinterpret Scripture and draw the wrong conclusions from it. The Anglican tradition, which emphasises corporate reading and hearing of Scripture, reminds us to bring our private thoughts, insights, and understandings into the community where the collective wisdom and faith can help us to understand and interpret Scripture with greater accuracy. We need then to

study the Bible together and enrich our individual understanding by sharing our particular insights with others.

Third, the statements of the Bible, in the context of worship, gain a fullness and balance they might otherwise not have. A passage that sounds judgemental, for example, is heard differently if we are about to join in the confession of sin, receive absolution, and then go to the altar to receive Christ's life into ours; judgement is always balanced in the liturgy by mercy - and if the readings centre on love, the confession of sin reminds us of the reality of judgement. Likewise, the single events of the life of Christ that we hear in the gospel are heard in the context of a service in which we recall, always, his death and resurrection. Christ is not simply a teacher or a healer; he died for us and rose again.

The Authority of the Bible

The prayer book contains several statements on the central place of the Bible in our common life. We can read in the Book of Common Prayer that the church is defined as a place where “the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments [are] duly ministered”. Word and Sacrament together make the church. Notice also that catechism statements that define the nature of the Bible, the statements in the Articles of Religion (Article VI on page 477) about the sufficiency of Holy Scriptures for salvation, and the various statements made by the bishops of the Anglican Communion which say that the Scriptures “as the rule and ultimate standard of faith” are the first prerequisite for Christian unity.

These statements are not mere theory: they are what act out in our worship week by week and day by day. It is out of this experience of the Bible in worship that we come to understand the claims made for its authority.

The Bible itself says, for example, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for proof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (1 Timothy 3:16). But “useful” leaves a great deal

to the imagination, and Christians have imagined a variety of possibilities. At the time of the Reformation some maintained that Christians should only do what Scripture directly commanded, while others maintained that Christians could do anything except what the Scriptures prohibited. The first way would hardly permit you to get out of bed in the morning and brush your teeth, while the second path opens up wide fields of opportunity for those with vivid imaginations. Richard Hooker, at the end of the 16th century, noticed that some Christians claimed that Scripture alone was not enough and other authority was needed, while others claimed that with the Scripture no other guidance was needed. The first opinion he rejected out of hand but the second moved him to caution that we should be careful not to claim so much for Scripture that we make its valid claims unbelievable as well. The Anglican position, stated clearly in the service of ordination and elsewhere, is that we should require no beliefs except what we are persuaded can be solidly based on the Scriptures, but we are free to adopt beliefs and customs that seem consistent with the scriptural witness even though they may not be directly stated. There is, for example no direct scriptural authority for worship on Sunday, for organs or parish councils, for stained-glass windows or children's Sunday school programs, but the first day of the week or "Lord's Day" was significant to Christians from the earliest times (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10), the adornment of worship, within reasonable limits, is consistent with the patterns of worship reflected in Exodus 38-39, 1 Kings 7, and Revelation 4, and the training of children is commended in Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4.

But the Bible is not a set of instructions that can give us simple answers to all questions or a text with which to prove points. In the first place, the guidance the Bible gives was provided for society very different from ours and still in the early stages of growth in knowledge of God's love. The existence of such instructions as to stone a disobedient son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) should give us pause in simply quoting the Bible to justify our actions. Sometimes Jesus himself overrode scriptural commandments with new

commands, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). So, when we find the Bible saying, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, we can read it as a bloodthirsty law to be ignored (which makes large parts of the Bible irrelevant), an unchanging standard to be enforced in our modern penal code (which puts us back to a pre-Christian world), or we can learn through further study that this command was a step forward for a world whose usual rule was unlimited vengeance (e.g., a life for an eye), and that it was a rule superseded in its turn by Jesus’ injunction to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39).

In the second place, any set of words is open to various interpretations. When a computer programmer writes instructions to a computer, the computer will read those instructions and follow them exactly. Sometimes the programmer will be frustrated because the computer does exactly what it is told to, even when the instructions it is given are not exactly right. But there is never any difference between what the programmer writes and what the computer does. When a human being reads the Bible, on the other hand, the results are far less predictable. Even if the Bible were like computer instructions, the code to be followed exactly, the results would be unpredictable because human beings are not computers and far from being predictable at all. God, being ultimately responsible for both the text of the Bible and the nature of human beings, presumably understood that in creating both and made allowances. The authority of the Bible is not that of a dictator or a rulebook, and to understand it better, we need to think about what the Bible actually is.

What the Bible Is

First of all, the bible is not a book - it’s a library. The bible comprises 66 different volumes written by a variety of writers in a variety of genres for a variety of intended audiences. The books of the Old and New Testaments range through poetry (some of it quite erotic), law, biography, genealogy, advice on a number of subjects and history (although not necessarily history in the form and discipline

that a 21st Century readership would recognise and expect). There are examples of personal correspondence, quite fantastical allegory and what is known as apocalyptic literature, written in an elaborate code to avoid persecution. There are even books that anticipate modern travel writing. Gathered together under divine inspiration by the founders and theologians of the early church, the Bible has been accepted as the primary source of God's revelation to humanity, and as an source for understanding how humankind has searched for and related to God. It is important that we appreciate that none of the books of the Bible were written directly to or for present-day readers; we need to understand the context, intention and setting of Scripture as best we can as we read and try to understand it. (Annotated or "study" Bibles, biblical commentaries and Bible-reading courses can all be of assistance in this regard).

Let's continue with some history. The Reformation took place because some Christians felt that the church had been giving them the wrong answers to their questions about the human relationship with God. Many Christians felt that they would do better to turn to the Bible for answers. Unfortunately, they were used to getting very specific directions for their lives from the church, and many began asking for the same sort of directions from the Bible. For example, the church had ordered Christians to fast on Friday, so it was natural to turn to the Bible for directions that might be different but would be just as simple and clear. Instead of looking for a different kind of authority, people looked for the same sort of authority from a different source. In effect, they asked the Bible to become the authority instead of asking whether Christians were supposed to have such authority at all. But since the Bible does not provide specific answers to many questions and human beings may read the same passages with very different understanding, this kind of use of the Bible has produced divisions in the church with many different denominations claiming the single true interpretation.

But the Bible is not a rulebook. If God had wanted us to have a rulebook, surely a better and much more specific one could have been provided than this. The Bible is something quite different; we

go to it not to find particular words to answer our questions but to find the Word who created us who knows our needs before we ask.

The Bible is a collection of writings produced in various times and places over a span of more than a thousand years in which we can see what God has done through individuals and through the history of nations and peoples. It begins with the story of a primitive people who were slaves in Egypt and who knew themselves to have been set free through God's action in their history. God had acted to set them free; therefore God must be One who cared about freedom and hated oppression. God, they began to see, was a God of justice. Later this same people became secure and wealthy and began to enslave others. Inspired men and women, called prophets, warned that God's justice was as likely to destroy them as the Egyptians if they persisted, and not long after that they found themselves defeated and carried off into Babylonian captivity. But then the prophets spoke of mercy and forgiveness, and indeed, the people were set free and were able to return to their own country and begin again. But the knowledge of God's care for them led them to dream of peace and freedom beyond any they had yet experienced and to look for God to act again both in history and at the end of history. The Bible tells us how God did act in Christ and how those who came to know and follow Christ continued to speak of God's purpose in history and beyond it.

So the Bible is, first of all, a record of what God has done in history, the God revealed in real events and supremely revealed in one real life. It is the story of how certain people came slowly to understand who God is by meditating on these actions of God in history. That aspect of the Bible alone gives us much to ponder. If God overthrew the Egyptians because they were unjust and if God's own people were sent in to exile when they were unjust, how will God judge my society, my business, my personal life? If God is working in history towards a purpose, and in my private life, in my church, and in my society working towards that purpose or against it? Read this way, the Bible may not always add to our comfort.

The Bible also, of course, tells us in the New Testament the story of Jesus: not simply a biography, but a gospel, good news, the story of a life that changes all life. If God is supremely revealed in the life of Jesus, have I come to know God in that life, in a living and personal relationship with God in Christ?

The Bible also contains the story of how the church began and shows us the problems faced and how it dealt with them. Sometimes these problems are very similar to ours and sometimes very different. But even the way Christians dealt with issues different from those we face may be useful to us today. St Paul, for example, wrote to the church in Corinth at great length about the problem of food offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8, 10:14-32). Should Christians eat such food or not? This is not a problem most of us face, but the guidance Paul offers remains as relevant as ever: eat the food or not, as you please, but give no offence to others and do all for the glory of God.

Sometimes, however, the guidance given may seem to be relevant to us when it is not. When St Paul writes that women should keep their heads covered in church, he is applying a contemporary norms of decency and saying the Christian women should follow the contemporary norms. But in Australia today decency no longer requires a head covering and it would be unnecessarily old-fashioned to make that a requirement. It is not the specific advice given that is relevant to us but the principle behind the advice. In a somewhat similar way, Anglicans came to believe that when the Bible says women should not speak in church (1 Corinthians 14:33-36), is again asking church members to follow contemporary etiquette, but when St Paul says that in Christ there is neither male nor female, slave or free, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), he is holding up a vision of a very different society in which neither race nor gender is a barrier to church membership or leadership. Thus, when we come at last in the world in which women are truly free to use the gifts God has given them in any walk of life, the church should not only accept that change but rejoice in it and endorse it by its own practice. We would

understand the Bible to be holding up a vision of a transformed society on the one hand, but on the other hand suggesting that we not move toward that vision in such a way that others are unnecessarily offended.

But the distinction between eternal principles and expedient practices is not always clear and will often be controversial. The churches that make up the Anglican Communion across the world have been badly divided over the issue of ordaining women to the priesthood and it has been very difficult to find the right balance between responding in justice to those called to be ordained while respecting the consciences of those not convinced. One piece of guidance the Prayer Book gives is that “we understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the church in the interpretation of the scriptures”. In other words, we should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit both individually and as a church and be willing to recognise that the whole church may be wiser than any one individual or small group. We must remember too, that “the church” includes other ages as well as our own; when the whole weight of Christian tradition is against what our age believes is right, we need to move-as the church did in ordaining women-with very careful deliberation. Christians who, as the BCP directs, “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the words of Holy Scripture will understand that suffering and tension have been the lot of God's people throughout history (read Hebrews 11, for example), but that God's purpose is not thwarted by our failures. God asks us to be faithful, not to overwhelm all enemies. “Patience and comfort” (or “steadfastness and encouragement”) are gifts promised to us through reliance on the Scriptures (Romans 15:4).

Finally, we need to understand that when the Prayer Book speaks of the Bible as the “rule and ultimate standard of faith”, it does not mean that every word of the Bible contains the same authority. Martin Luther once spoke of the Bible being like the manger at Bethlehem: containing the Christ Child but surrounded by much straw. That seems overly harsh, but most Christians would agree that they find the 23rd Psalm more valuable than the 58th and the

fifth chapter of Matthew is of more help than the third chapter of Leviticus. And even straw serves a purpose: Mary would have been reluctant to place the newborn baby on bare planks, and even the “strawiest” parts of the Bible provide context and setting for the rest.

Interpreting the Bible

The Bible is central to the life of the Anglican Church; that can hardly be doubted. But if a visitor stood at the door of the church and asked each member of the congregation what the Bible had said to them that morning, you would probably get as many replies as there were people present. One might mention having found help in dealing with an important business decision, another might have found guidance in coping with a personal crisis, still another might have been struck by the way a particular passage spoke to a current national issue, and another might say, “In all honesty, I can't remember what was read, but the choir's anthem gave me the sense of peace that I really needed.” It is very likely that the priest tried to explain the meaning of one of the passages in the sermon and that many of those present found it helpful. But, again, the help they found might range from a better understanding of the passage to guidance with a variety of particular personal and social problems.

Should the Bible always speak to everyone in the same way? Some Christians do try to make the Bible say the same thing to everyone and to suggest that everyone should understand it in the same way. But Anglicans, as I have said, have traditionally found their unity in a common pattern of worship, and that has left them able to allow much more freedom in the reading and understanding of Holy Scripture. They expect that the readings on a given Sunday will speak to different people differently. They will also be aware that outside the Anglican Church there is an even wider range of ways of understanding the Bible and that it may be helpful to realise that the Bible has been read and understood in very different ways in the past.

For example, we might consider the chapter headings in the Old Testament book the Song of Solomon, in the King James Version of the Bible. The text of this book seems to be about human love, and there are some rather erotic passages, but the chapter headings (added at the time of translation) tell us it is about the mutual "Love of Christ and his Church" and "The church's love to Christ." Modern scholars disagree as to whether the poem deals with the love of a man and woman for each other or the love of God for the land of Israel. But an earlier age assumed that all Scripture dealt with our relationship with God and had to be interpreted that way.

Similarly, the New Testament twice cites an Old Testament verse (Deuteronomy 25:4) about muzzling an ox while it treads out the grain as evidence that a preacher should be paid (1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18). Modern scholars would see it as evidence of the proper concern for the welfare of animals, but earlier generations assumed that there were deeper meanings to be found even in passages that seemed to have very little spiritual importance. A literal interpretation of the Bible requires us to accept the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament; a more historical perspective allows us to understand the Old Testament passage in its own context and to accept the rather different approach of the New Testament writers without limiting ourselves to their particular interpretation. Earlier ages lacked the depth of historical understanding that we have gained; they judged everything in the terms of their own day, as Renaissance artists, for example, depicted biblical figures in Renaissance clothing. Today, we understand that other ages have not all dressed alike and thought alike and we are less likely to try to squeeze their thoughts into the same mould.

Of course, we too are limited by our age and its expectations. Some Christians today would reject out of hand biblical passages that conflict with modern science, and some, on the other hand would reject modern science where it seems to conflict with the Bible. Anglicans generally have not gone to either of these extremes, but I found it better to try to read the words of the Bible with as full as

possible an understanding of the situation of those who wrote and first heard them. To see and hear the Scriptures that way can then help us to interpret them for the needs and situation of our own times.

Reading the Bible

How then should Anglicans read the Bible? Having heard it in the context of worship, how do we proceed to incorporate it more fully in our lives-or better, incorporate our lives more fully into it?

What we should do is not what almost every Bible reader has done at one time or another: open it at the first page and begin to read. We will do well enough for a few chapters, but quickly bog down in genealogies, unpronounceable names, and a vengeful bloodthirstiness that seems far removed from almost any vision of God we might have had before. Perhaps the following guidelines might be helpful:

1. Don't begin at the beginning. The books of the Bible are not arranged in the order in which they were written or the order in which events took place. Some of the earliest material is found halfway through the Bible, in the Psalms. The Book of Daniel was written several centuries after the Book of Amos although it is placed before it in the Bible. The Gospel according to St Matthew was probably written after the Gospel according to St Mark. The Epistle to the Galatians was written before the Epistle to the Romans. Most Christians probably should read the Bible through end to end at some point, but a good place to start is with the story of Jesus in one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). After that, the book of Genesis contains stories everyone should know, and the story of the Kingdom of David in 1 and 2 Samuel is not only great history but provides a picture of David, warts and all, that shows how God can be at work in a deeply flawed yet deeply responsive human life. The Book of Acts gives us a picture of the early church and the travels of St Paul. The Epistles to the Corinthians and Romans

help us see how St Paul gave early Christians guidance in church matters and daily living. You might try reading one of these books in its entirety, and then move to another.

2. Look to the church for guidance. It has been said that the Bible is “the church’s book.” The Bible contains books that the church chose over many others as being of particular value. The lectionaries which are available in our and many other churches provide guidance as to which passages of the biblical books our utmost value. (The first five books of the Bible, with 186 chapters, are cited 39 times in the Sunday lectionary, but so is the Book of Isaiah, with only 66 chapters.
3. Get help. In the early days of the church, Philip met a man who was reading the prophet Isaiah. When Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, he replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:26-39). The answer remains, “You probably can’t.” You don't absolutely need to know why the events of creation are told in one order in the first chapter of Genesis and the reverse order in the second chapter, but it will certainly help to have it explained. You don't have to know the difference between a Sadducee and Pharisee, but it will be easier to understand the Gospels if you know something about these groups. A class at your church may be helpful; a home Bible study group can help a lot; you might also consider using a Bible commentary or an annotated Bible. Remember that almost all the Bible was written to and for communities, and it is still best read in a community. As we study the Bible with others, we gain a deeper and broader understanding from the insights-and they will gain from ours.
4. Pray. The purpose of Bible study is the formation of a closer relationship with God; therefore the Bible needs always to be set in the context of prayer. God is more likely to speak to you through the Bible if you ask God to do so.

5. Set appropriate goals. Do not expect the Bible to advise you as to which stocks to invest in or whom you should marry. Do expect that you will make better decisions in these and other areas if you have been reading the Bible prayerfully.

But do read the Bible. The Bible has been understood in different ways in different times and is given varying interpretations as an authority in our own day, but it has always guided, strengthened, and inspired those who've turned to it with open minds and hearts. Long and learned commentaries have been written about the Sermon on the Mount and exactly to whom Jesus was referring when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." No doubt we can profit by the study of those words, but they speak to us whether we have done such study or not. No particular scholarship or guidance is needed to find value in passages like the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd," or 1 Corinthians 13, "Love never ends." Some may read the Book of Revelation and become possessed by the thought that they can calculate the exact date of the end of the world; others will find the passage that says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1-2), and be inspired to work toward that vision by joining a parish roster or helping in a soup kitchen or serving on a committee organising programs for those in need or by getting involved in community life in some other constructive way. Still others, bereaved or lonely, will read, beginning with the next verse, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will glow with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away," and they will hear it as the word they need and find new strength.

No wonder we Anglicans make such use of the Bible in public worship, in corporate study, and in private as well. Through it, we come to know and be strengthened and guided by the God who

calls us into the church to worship and sends us out to love and serve.

MF August 2018

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An article appeared a few years ago in "The London Times" by Alex Renton, a non-believer who sends his six-year-old daughter Lulu to a Scottish church primary school. Her teachers asked her to write the following letter: "To God, How did you get invented?" The Rentons were taken aback: "We had no idea that a state primary affiliated with a church would do quite so much God," says her father. He could have told Lulu that, in his opinion, there was no God; or he could have pretended that he was a believer. He chose to do neither, instead emailing her letter to the Scottish Episcopal Church (no reply), the Presbyterians (ditto) and the Scottish Catholics (a nice but theologically complex answer). For good

measure, he also sent it to "the head of theology of the Anglican Communion, based at Lambeth Palace" – and this was the response:

Dear Lulu,

Your dad has sent on your letter and asked if I have any answers. It's a difficult one! But I think God might reply a bit like this –

'Dear Lulu – Nobody invented me – but lots of people discovered me and were quite surprised. They discovered me when they looked round at the world and thought it was really beautiful or really mysterious and wondered where it came from. They discovered me when they were very very quiet on their own and felt a sort of peace and love they hadn't expected.

Then they invented ideas about me – some of them sensible and some of them not very sensible. From time to time I sent them some hints – specially in the life of Jesus – to help them get closer to what I'm really like.

But there was nothing and nobody around before me to invent me. Rather like somebody who writes a story in a book, I started making up the story of the world and eventually invented human beings like you who could ask me awkward questions!'

And then he'd send you lots of love and sign off.

I know he doesn't usually write letters, so I have to do the best I can on his behalf. Lots of love from me too.

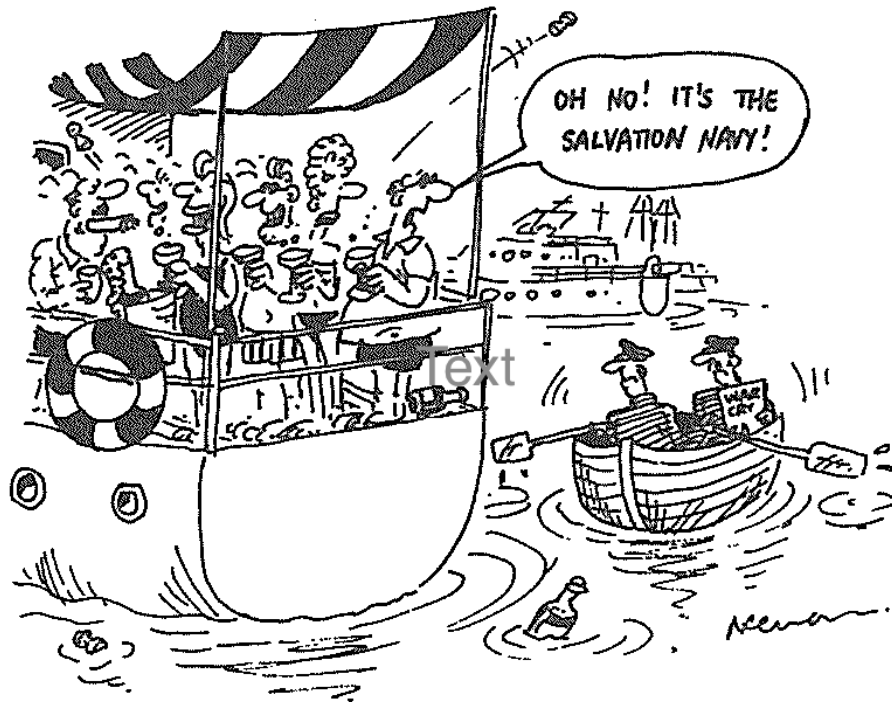
+Archbishop Rowan

I think this letter reveals a lot about the former Archbishop of Canterbury's sort of theology – more, indeed, than many of his lectures or abstruse Synod addresses.

But what the letter also tells us is that the Archbishop took the trouble to write a really thoughtful message – unmistakably his work and not that of a secretary – to a little girl. "Well done,

Rowan!" was the reaction of Lulu Renton's mother and father, and I agree.

Fr Michael



God of love,
we pray you give us love:
Love in our thinking, love in our speaking,
love in our doing and love in the
hidden places of our souls;
love of our neighbours, near and far;
love of our friends old and new;
love of those with whom we find it hard to bear,
and love of those who find it hard to bear with us;
love of those with whom we work,
and love of those with whom we take our ease;
love in joy, love in sorrow, love in life and love in death,
so that at length we may dwell with you,
who are Eternal Love.
Amen.