

Ecumenical Service for Heritage Weekend 2017 – focussing on 17th Century

A sermon by Emma Hodge

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen

The seventeenth century saw long sermons often on political topics or different divisions in religion; however you can all breathe easily as I take a more 21st century approach in regards to length and content!

The seventeenth century was a tumultuous time, families and the country were torn apart by civil war, added to this we had Guy Fawkes attempting to blow up parliament and the black death; yet the seventeenth century was also noted for the finalisation of the book of common prayer and the King James Bible, both of which are still in use today.

The Book of Common Prayer had at as one of its key principles that everything should be biblically based and as a result it is very full of scripture. While the Book of Common Prayer may not be everyone's preferred style of worship, it has played a big part in shaping this country and all our worship.

While the Book of Common Prayer may have been the work primarily of one man, with several other people altering it afterwards, The King James Bible was the work of about 50 scholars working in three different locations throughout England, this was a first, previous translations of the bible had been only conducted by individuals or a couple of people. This was then became the bible that was used in the churches. Several of us will have this bible at home and a lot of us will have at least one other version at home. We can choose from a range of the bibles available, all with slightly different approaches to translation and emphasis and we can easily choose the one (or ones) we want based on which version we prefer.

However the one thing that is the same between the King James Bible and the range of bibles that we have available today, that is what the bible actually is. The Bible, now, just as then, is not just a collection of 66 separate books, rather it is the Word of God and as such contains instructions on the nature of God, and how we should live our lives so that we can follow Him.

The bible contains the message of God, showing us His love for people throughout the ages. The bible is not always easy to understand, we all struggle with it and trying to apply it to our lives, but there are other sections, which show God's love and he has given us the laws and is summed up in the summary of the commandments.

While we all have easy access to the bible now, it doesn't necessarily mean that we read it?

God's word is in the bible, If we want to know what God is saying to us about who we are and how we should live our lives, then we need to refer to the bible. All Christians are connected through the Bible, Tonight we are here to celebrate the work that each one of us and our churches play in our community, to come together to worship the God who loves, who made the world, who sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for us so that we may have eternal life.

The bible is not always easy to understand and it certainly is not easy to apply to our lives, but as our reading from Deuteronomy said we need love the lord our God, but how can we love him, if we do not know him? Getting to know God is essential, it is the same for all Christians which is why the writer of Deuteronomy also gave the instruction to teach future generations about the amazing God.

Our Hebrews reading went further and referred back to the Old Testament where it said that people had heard God's word but didn't apply it to their lives. A warning that still applies to us today, It is no good just hearing the word. We need to understand how it applies to each of us today and we all work to nurture and develop our faith and several of us also have a leadership role in our churches, which means we work to develop and nurture other people's faith, that could be from hosting a house group where a few people meet to look in detail at a particular bible passage to our clergy. Those who are not in leadership roles also have an important role to play in supporting others, in a variety of ways but most importantly through prayer.

As we reflect back on the Christian community that has been in Sandhurst over all the centuries, as we have grown and developed in different churches, and how we will continue to grow and develop both separately and together, the

key point is that we all worship the same God, the God who created the heavens and earth and who sent his only son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ to die for us so that we may receive eternal life.

Amen