

RICHARD'S PASTORAL LETTER – September 2019



Tim is a thoroughly nice chap but he has created a dilemma; I really should have known better but weakness overtook me. In my previous district I was Local Preachers' tutor for 4 Circuits and Tim was one of my students. To mark my departure, he very kindly bought me a book. Therein is the nub of my problem.

Don't get me wrong - it is a really interesting book telling world history from the perspective of the Silk roads, the trading routes from the really early days, through Marco Polo to the present day. Currently I am engrossed in the inter-war years and the European powers fighting for influence in Persia, Palestine and the Levant, but it is not really bed time reading. It is more of a holiday book, needing time to concentrate; but because it was a gift, normal rules were set aside and I am battling to get through it before September dawns with all its wonders. I made the mistake of starting to read it at bedtime.

For normally the great delight at the end of the day is putting my nose in a novel and getting lost in the imagination of the author, be it a classic or something more contemporary, and, courtesy of a gift voucher, I have two novels sitting on the bedside cabinet beckoning to me hopefully.

There is something about a story that is exciting; one book I really enjoyed is an American classic called Stoner by John Williams, which is famed because in 288 pages not much happens. It is an impressive piece of writing, a reminder that all life is not so exciting but there is still a story to tell.

There is an important message for us here as we journey on. Each of our stories has great value because it is a picture of the activity of God, so, whether we came into the church via a Damascus Road experience or, like me, a more gradual journey, there is something special because it reveals

the hand of our God. Each us is an evolving story of grace. Part of the challenge we face is to unlock some of these stories; this might be the basis of a local arrangement service, where we can hear how God has touched and continues to touch lives.

The song invites us to 'Count our Blessings', and this is something that we need to articulate to help each other sense the way that God is moving. Active in the spectacular, but more often in the mundanities of everyday life.

So, a thought - when did you last think about the story of your faith journey? Is it time to update our Christian CV, as there is the danger that the new minister or someone else in the congregation may ask us the question? So how did it start; what have been the big moments, and what recently or currently has touched us, made us think, helped awareness; where have we seen God's hand at work, be it a huge demonstration or a barely discernible hint? It may be currently faith is a struggle due to something that has happened, and, here again, talking about this could bring forth those who have travelled or are journeying on the same path.

The blurb on the cover of my copy of Stoner describes the novel as "the greatest novel you've never read". It is so important that we give voice to our stories, warts and all, as a way of showing the authenticity of faith. We need to be bold and dare to talk of what is important as a way of enabling ourselves to engage with the wider world. At times these will be stories laced with joy, at others redolent with pain or sadness, but all part of the way of discipleship. Stories that speak not of us, but of God in the midst, and our seeking his voice in the midst of the clamour of the world.

May we take the opportunity to share and to listen so that our stories will further enrich the church of Christ.

Blessings

Richard

Rev. Richard Atkinson