

To see others in deep relationships, rewarding jobs and with a sense of direction that compels them to jump out of bed with a spring in their step.

In the *'Lord of the rings'*, Tolkien writes a poem which includes the line, "Not all who wander are lost." And the same applies to us. Even though we might feel like we're wandering without any real purpose, that doesn't mean we are. Each and every one of us can get a sense of purpose and discover what God has for our lives.

In the book of James, we discover where we begin for it says "If any of you lacks wisdom, let them ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given them."

We start on our knees, in our beds or wherever it is that we find it easiest to pray.

We read our bibles....Psalms 119, says "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

The primary way God speaks to us is through the Bible.

We won't find verses about what to cook for dinner or what to wear on a night out, but we will discover how God thinks and feels about us, why we were made and the direction to go in, in order to see a fulfilled life. Each one of us is born with a certain gift, we might have more than one, we might not yet know what it is, but it is there, we might have a talent for listening but not for speaking, we might have a mind for figures and detail, but not for leading, we might be an organiser or a healer. God's purpose for us often begins with the things we enjoy and are good at...it's unlikely that God's calling you to clean the loos if you have a germ phobia. In the book of Proverbs, we hear the words "Where there is no guidance, people fall, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety." In other words, one of the main ways God helps us find our purpose is through others, which is why spending time with people who love Christ is so important. In John's gospel Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does". Jesus knew what he was called to do, because he spent time with God. He read about him, he communed with him, he walked with him. Trying to discover our life's purpose can be an overwhelming thing. We might feel silly if we're getting on in years and maybe aren't sure what we have left to offer.

We might have less mobility that we once did and so feel vulnerable, we might not have much in the way of resources or we might be so young we aren't even sure who we are let alone why we're here. But what's important wherever we are on our journey is that we start somewhere, that we say to God, 'Lord I want your Spirit to be upon me so that I too can be good news to the world, however small that world is. And then simply trust God to begin the process because while we might get confused, God doesn't and knows exactly the reason why he made, called and saved us and is eager for us to find out too.

Amen

St Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown

27.10.19 Bible Sunday Fr. Grant Cohen

Luke 4:16-24 Finding our Purpose

I can remember my very first sermon, it went on for far too long, as I tried to explain everything that the bible had to say in 20 mins. I spoke so fast that no one had a clue what I was on about and it was very dry. Lots of preachers use humour in their sermons, and some do so to get the congregation to relax before telling them that they are a miserable bunch of sinners who need to do better. Not that that's what I think of you of course...But after my sermon last week someone said to me "we only laugh because you do..." Another said your sermons are getting better, I'm glad they think so.

The truth is I don't think jokes make sermons more interesting, but I do like to see you laugh which is why I tell them. I decided to find out what other people say to after hearing a sermon'

One lady said to her vicar, "That was an amazing message. Too bad no one will ever respect you with your shirt not tucked in young man."

Another told the vicar "Coming from my other church and my former priest to here listening to you, is like going from filet steak to a cheap burger."

The vicar didn't say anything but the following week when he saw the parishioner, he handed her a bottle of ketchup, and told her to go back if she saw fit to criticise him again.

And finally, an elderly guest organist said to the vicar after the service - "Did you go to bible college", when he replied yes, she said "But did you graduate?"

A 5-year-old boy asked his mum "Where did I come from?" his mum took a deep breath because she had dreaded this moment, but in explicit detail she told the lad everything from beginning to end.

About 20 minutes later, her bored little boy interrupted & said, "But mum, where did I come from? Because Gareth is from New York."

Today is bible Sunday, and certainly the bible is no laughing matter...there are things in this book which have led people to war, murder, and hate all because it's been misunderstood, taken out of context and used as a tool to rule over others.

Someone asked why is it that people don't go to church anymore, one of the responses was that people no longer believe the bible and certainly don't fear hell enough to miss golf or shopping on a Sunday.

So why do we come to church every week, why do we sing or choose not to sing? why do we give, or choose not to give? Why do we take communion?

I hope and am sure that for the vast majority of us we come to worship, but we might also come to get points with God, to make ourselves feel better, or have the opportunity to be with others.

In John's gospel we hear what's probably the most precious verse in all the bible "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son..."

My family are due to spend Christmas with me this year, (if the building work at the vicarage is finished in time) they will come to midnight mass which isn't something that they don't normally do, we will share Christmas day together, something that I've not been able to do since my ordination, and we will share gifts. Now because we don't all see each other over Christmas we don't all buy for each other, and so there have been conversations back and forth about who we should buy for and how much we should spend. But as my sister pointed out "This isn't what it's all about" and she's right. Like me you may have already begun thinking about Christmas, buying the odd present, deciding whose coming or where you're going, but the sad truth is that in 7 weeks' time, in hundreds of thousands of homes the guest of honour will be forgotten at his own birthday party, I heard it said that when talking about Christmas somebody exclaimed "Why is it that the church has to get involved in everything!"

When people talk about the 'true meaning of Christmas,' what they often mean is family times together, a moment in time when the problems of the world can be shut out even its only for a day. A time when we can meet all our needs and desires, eat good food and have family closeness, enjoy a warm cosy church service with lovely music, and take a well-earned break from work and school. But we know that that's not why Jesus came, although I'm sure he loves the fact that we celebrate the day well. The bible is the story of brokenness and salvation, it's a story about tragedy and forgiveness, passion and murder but most importantly it's about God wanting to make things right and be back in relationship with the creation he made and that's the real meaning of Christmas.

The good news of Jesus isn't just about getting people into heaven when they die, it's about them discovering why we are here and what we can do about it. And its in our gospel reading where we read how Jesus answered that question for himself when he preached his first sermon in Nazareth.

As a guest at the synagogue, he was invited to read from the bible. We don't know if the Isaiah passage was the reading for the day, or just one that he chose:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me...to preach good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

When he sat down, as was the custom for the Rabbi when he went from reading to teaching, Jesus told them that the prophecy, the words he had just read were about to happen.

It was Jesus' statement of why he was here.

He was here to make things right in the world. he was here to challenge injustice for the poor, for prisoners, the blind and the oppressed, he was here to show people how God felt about them and what they ought to do in response.

WW2 was the worst war ever fought on earth with about 40 countries actually fighting and 61 others involved. There were only 6 neutral countries and 85 million people were killed with 11 million refugees.

But on Sept. 2, 1945, the war was officially over, and some of you will remember the celebration in the streets, the sound of Church bells ringing, and crowds celebrating the end of the largest war ever fought when everyone could go home in peace. It was a time of jubilee.

'The year of jubilee' as written about in the book of Leviticus was what Jesus was referring to when he said he'd come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. He was talking about a time where liberty was proclaimed to everyone and where it was intended to benefit everyone, both masters and servants, men and women, rich and poor.

It was an occasion celebrated every 7th year to remind everyone that they were part of one big family brothers and sisters, everyone part of a theocratic kingdom with God as Father of them all.

In that year, the land rested, debts were forgiven, slaves set free, and relationships restored.

But like that sense of peace that people felt but was so short lived following WW2, I'm not sure that the Israelites never truly got to grips with the year of jubilee as it was intended, because it's certainly not what we see today.

But that's the ideal that Jesus came to bring and to institute through us his body here on earth. The opportunity for people whose lives have for so long been filled with nothing but bad news to hear something worthwhile and liberating.

That those who have been held captive in prisons of all kinds can get their freedom.

That those who for years have spent so many days holding wet tissues full of their tears can get comforted and pointed toward a day of smiles and laughter.

Isaiah 61 was Jesus' purpose; it was there in the bible long before he was ever born....and it's still there for us to do something about too.

Whatever God calls for, He provides for. Whatever were born to do, is already paid for. Therefore, the greatest tragedy in life is not that we die; its a life without a purpose.

Our existence is evidence that this world needs something that our lives contains.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we read; "God has set eternity in our hearts at birth; that is to say, he put his own heart and desire for our eternal purpose within us. In essence, every single person was born for a purpose and with a purpose.

There's nothing worse than waking up feeling purposeless. To look around and see friends and colleagues living what we perceive as meaningful lives.