

SERMON – 2 OCTOBER 2021 – Genesis 2.18-24, Hebrews 1.1-4,5-12, Mark 10.2-16

Julie's got the easy job this morning – she's got St Eds Harvest Festival with a speaker from Christian Aid. They can ignore the two readings we have used, and concentrate on Genesis and the Psalm. I'm supposed to use Hebrews and Mark.

Jesus' teaching on divorce is something most of us find very, very difficult. I've managed to stay happily married (most of the time) to the same woman for almost 38 years – I know how fortunate I am, I know that many of you have not been that fortunate. I'm sure that all of you tried, and I know there are all sorts of reasons why marriage didn't work. We've been in touch with lots of friends for Julie's big birthday party – and one friend replied saying she'd love to come, but she's no longer with her husband. We didn't get to their wedding as it was the day Gareth came into the world – and you wonder why they've now separated after 32 years.

Male and female, one flesh, two people sharing life together – and that doesn't work for everyone here either! There are still too many Christians who simply say “tough” – but we know that faith, and love, and the way we are made, that incredibly mystery of the life that God has given us, all these things are worth fighting for, because God is a God of love, and his love transcends all.

We watched Grantchester this week – and, although I wonder how any Vicar has time to such a detective as well, it is worth watching. Good detective series, set in Cambridge, late 50s, early 60s, about the time I was born. Part of the recent story line has Leonard the curate being caught in bed with a man. He's arrested, charged, and was in court charged with gross indecency. The bishop has disowned and defrocked him, his Vicar has stood with him, and the parish is divided. We have watched Leonard's struggle with his God, with himself, with the church he promised to serve, with the congregation he has struggled to serve – with those who love and accept him, and those who tell him eternal damnation is his destination.

When I get depressed about the state of today's Church of England, indeed the state of England itself, I realise how much we have moved on the course of my lifetime. We have a damn sight further to go – but we have made some progress and, with God's help, we will make more.

Nor must we forget the challenge of the last few verses either – we don't want children either. They are noisy, get in the way, and stop us having our adult time with Jesus. Here I am with two churches in communities where we have lots of

children, where lots of families come to bring their child to be baptised, where we do lot with schools – and neither church has dynamic all age services or any sort of Kids' Church. It is depressing, another thing we need to do – but where is the energy and the people and everything else we need? And have we got to do everything twice because, even though the kids may go to the same school, they live in different places and we act as two churches.

We all need to remind ourselves it is the Kingdom of God that we are talking about, the kingdom of God that we are part of, the Kingdom of God that we are trying to proclaim. And I can't be bothered, and we can't be bothered, we are tired. These days if I start taking children in my arms there will be a safeguarding case, don't do it – but I am a child of God, we are children of God, and I have no doubt that God is allowed to take us, his children, into his arms, and if what we need to get us through winter 2021 and into winter 2022 – God has more than enough hugs available.

I often tell wedding couples that

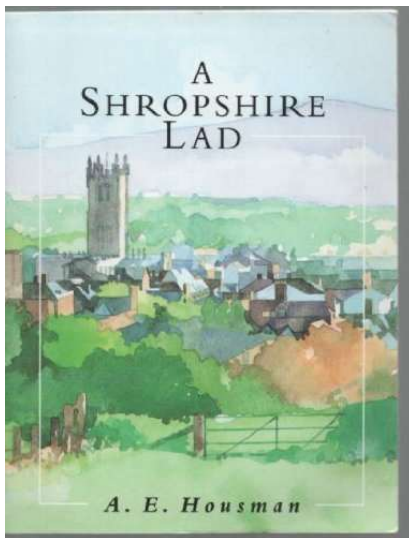
Remember that you do not start this marriage in your strength. When you exchange rings in a moment you will say "I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage. With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen, God's love is greater than your love, and God gives you more than enough love.

It goes for couples, and it goes for all of us.

The book of Hebrews starts with God speaking to our ancestors in many and various ways through his prophets. Then he brings us his Son. This is the Son who is part of the Father, the Son who was there, was part of creation. The reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of his very being. Just meditate on that for a moment - The reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of his very being.

We've had a lot of rain in Wales last week, we've had rivers, puddles, and the sea – and reflections, glimpses of God's glory.

Too often we are too busy to catch these glimpses. On holiday last week we spent a day in Shrewsbury. We used to have family holidays in Shropshire when I was a lad, and on Friday I spent a couple of hours in the museum – they have Thomas Telford's trundle wheel (his measuring wheel) – and a nice museum shop.



I purchased this little book, the poems by A.E. Housman, and sat in the sun reading poetry while my wife went shopping. Dad loved Housman's poems, he would read them, and he often sang them set to music by George Butterworth. Let's look to the Spring – page 3, Loveliest of trees

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough,  
And stands about the woodland ride  
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,  
Twenty will not come again,  
And take from seventy springs a score,  
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom  
Fifty springs are little room,  
About the woodlands I will go  
To see the cherry hung with snow.

Many of these poems were written just before and during the trauma of the First World War – I didn't realise that Housman spent his War in Cambridge, he was Kennedy Professor of Latin at Trinity College, and this poem reminds us why we will be commemorating and remembering, once again, in a few weeks' time  
page 34 The lads in their hundreds

THE LADS in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,  
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,  
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,  
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.

There's chaps from the town and the field and the till and the cart, 5  
 And many to count are the stalwart, and many the brave,  
 And many the handsome of face and the handsome of heart,  
 And few that will carry their looks or their truth to the grave.

I wish one could know them, I wish there were tokens to tell  
 The fortunate fellows that now you can never discern; 10  
 And then one could talk with them friendly and wish them farewell  
 And watch them depart on the way that they will not return.

But now you may stare as you like and there's nothing to scan;  
 And brushing your elbow unguessed-at and not to be told  
 They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man, 15  
 The lads that will die in their glory and never be old.

For me, these poems reminded me that we are held in the hand of God, all made in his image. Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters which, when you think about it, is something quite amazing.

This has been a week when it has been difficult to have much enthusiasm for our fellow human beings – but we went for a drive on Thursday to the small town of Kington, which is on the Welsh/English border – just into Herefordshire.

Kington, would you believe, has a radical bookshop – Lockdown Books, with a radical facebook page to match. Julie had been in touch as part of her tour of accessible bookshops and the owner was glad to welcome us. He'd obviously done his research – he doesn't get many Vicars into his shop. We had a great welcome, a good chat, and I have come away with this book – so I shall now have another week off to make time to read it.



I wonder what the manager of Lockdown Books would think about being part of my sermon – but I do believe that when you spend time and energy, and look for God in unusual places, you will find him.

We walked up to the beautiful church, and there were the ladies getting ready for harvest. I got chatting to the Vicar's wife, and there is the Church of England in all its rural glory, the flower arrangers doing what flower arrangers do best. I expressed surprise they were doing the flowers on Thursday – and was told that Mrs Jones had to go to hospital on Friday, so they'd all decided they could do Thursday. I raised an eyebrow, and she gave me a smile – we both knew that changing the day of the harvest flowers was a major event in the life of that church, but it had been done without much fuss.

We find God in amazing places – so never stop looking, and let's help each other to find him.