

PEOPLE MATTER

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day (Genesis 1 v 26-31)

About ten years ago a headteacher wrote to her year six pupils about their Key Stage Two SATS tests.

A Headteacher writes a letter to her year six pupils because the world has so many other messages it wants to speak to them.

It wants to tell them they have to be a certain way.

It wants to tell them what success looks like.

It wants to tell them what they have to do to get on in life.

It wants to tell them what’s really important.

It wants to tell them what they need to focus on.

It wants to tell them what they must do if they want to feel good about themselves.

It wants to define how you become valuable in the world.

It wants to determine how they will be able to fit in.

But the Headteacher of Barrowfield Primary School recognised there is an awful lot that SATS do not say about the pupils in her school. So, she wrote them a letter to remind them that their SATS results and all the messages that go with it are only part of the story.

Please find enclosed your end of KS2 test results. We are very proud of you as you demonstrated huge amounts of commitment and tried your very best during this tricky week.

However, we are concerned that these tests do not always assess all of what it is that make each of you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you... the way your teachers do, the way I hope to, and certainly not the way your families do.

They do not know that many of you speak two languages. They do not know that you can play a musical instrument or that you can dance or paint a picture.

They do not know that your friends count on you to be there for them or that your laughter can brighten the dreariest day. They do not know that you write poetry or songs, play or participate in sports, wonder about the future, or that sometimes you take care of your little brother or sister after school.

They do not know that you have travelled to a really neat place or that you know how to tell a great story or that you really love spending time with special family members and friends.

They do not know that you can be trustworthy, kind or thoughtful, and that you try, every day, to be your very best... the scores you get will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything.

So enjoy your results and be very proud of these but remember there are many ways of being smart.

Perhaps not much changes when we grow up. This world still has many messages it wants to speak to us.

The advertising world bombards us with messages day in and day out.

It wants to tell us the next product we'll need to make us happy.

It wants to tell us the next holiday we will need to be completely relaxed.

It wants to tell us the next gadget we deserve for all our hard work.

It wants to tell us the next investments we will need to make to secure our future.

It wants to tell us the way we need to look.

It wants to tell us of all the products we will need to be acceptable.

It wants to tell us the best way to live.

It wants to tell us how we can live a full and satisfied life.

It would be easy to say that all of those things are wrong and unhelpful, but that's not really true. Perhaps many of those things are gifts to us in a world that is, at times, hard and challenging. But it is true that in those kinds of messages, there's a lot that is true but not said. And it is true that God has some things to say about that. In fact, God wrote his own letter to us precisely because that's true. There are some things that are true that the world simply won't tell us.

So, God wrote us a letter. We call it the Bible. The Bible is complex, ancient, hard to understand, and in the end, written by people. But it expresses a deep truth that speaks about God. And there are some really important messages in the Bible that God wants us to hear.

Here's a truth I think we might find quite challenging: maybe there are some messages in the Bible about which we keep missing. Maybe there are some message in the Bible that have been overlaid by other messages so that we don't really hear them anymore. And maybe we've put a little too much emphasis on some messages which means we miss other really important messages.

I think the story we read in Genesis 1 has a really important message we often miss, and I think it's a message God wants to speak to us again. Actually, I think he already wrote it in his letter to us, and I think God writes it at the beginning of his letter because it's really important, and lays the ground for everything that follows.

When God has finished his extraordinary creation, he looks at everything he has made and he makes a stunning declaration: "God saw everything he had made, and it was very good!" Friends, how many times have you been told you are 'very good?' Perhaps a more challenging question: How much do you believe in your heart that you are very good?

My best guess is that some of us are now squirming in our seats. My best guess is that some of us find that kind of thought really quite uncomfortable. My

best guess is that we have not been told over our life time that we are very good. In fact, I'd hazard a guess that one of the reasons we're in church, as a Christian, is because we've learnt we are not good – and the answer is to become a Christian

My best guess is that as people who call themselves Christians, we wrestle with this: we are bad, God saved us and now we try to be good! But mostly we fail, because we are sin! And God sort of likes us, mostly when we don't sin – but And so on and so on!

Before anything else happens in the story of God and his people, after he has created them, God looks at the people he created and he declares: "they are very good!" He looks at those he created and he declares – You are very good, Ian, you are very good!

My best guess is that some of you are very uncomfortable with that thought. But this is the truth at the very beginning of the story of God and his people.

And here's what I think you might be thinking: "What about sin Ian?" Sin changes everything. Ian, you need to read on and read Genesis chapter three where sin enters the world. You're absolutely right, we do need to read Genesis chapter three and we do need to recognize that changed things. I'm not trying to say we never do things that are bad, that's obviously completely untrue. I'm not saying we don't have to wrestle with the way we live and think and act, of course we do.

All of creation is in a relationship with God, the creator and, as far as God is concerned, the relationship he has with the people he created is one he wants to stay in. God is unwavering in his commitment to the relationship with his people. In fact, the whole story of the Bible is the story of God, choosing at every turn to stick with the relationship with his people.

God never quits.

In chapter three when it all appears to go so horribly wrong, God makes clothes out of animal skins for Adam and Eve. That's God sticking with it.

The rainbow is God sticking with it.

The covenant is God sticking with it.

The exodus is God sticking with it.

The prophets is God sticking with it.

The judges is God sticking with it.

Jesus is God sticking with it.

The disciples is God sticking with it.

Pentecost is God sticking with it.

Revelation is God sticking with it.

The story begins with God-with-us and the story ends with God-with-us. And everything in between, including Jesus, is God-with-us.

We have convinced ourselves that sin puts God at a distance. We have convinced ourselves that sin somehow sets us naturally contrary to God – we're born that way. But God has always been, and is always now, and will always be, absolutely committed to us. Absolutely committed.

For I am convinced that neither life nor death, nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, or anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8 38-39)

God sticks with us.

Here's the truth: God's relationship with you is fully intact. Your relationship with him will vary from day to day, moment to moment, experience to experience, circumstance to circumstance. God is to you like water is to a fish. You cannot go anywhere, or do anything that takes you outside of God's love and presence.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139 v 7-12)

Friends, you belong to God, and he is sticking with you.

But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (Isaiah 43 v 1)

And we could read it this way:

But now, this is what the Lord says, he who created you Ian, he who formed you Ian Phillips. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you: I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

God is my home

God is your home

And that is the most important thing we need to know. It's the most important thing anyone and everyone needs to know.

God looks at you and me and everyone he created and says we are very good. His relationship with us is fully intact, he is sticking with us because our home is in him. God is for you, he is for you, he is for you, he is for you. And I pray for you, that you might know this love.

The Alpha course is one way we can introduce others to this deep and profound truth.

Video

Maybe friends, you want know more about this God who thinks you are very good and who sticks with you. Maybe you know someone you would like to introduce to this God who thinks they are very good and who sticks with them. Maybe you, or someone you know, could attend the Alpha course. We're planning to run one sometime in the Autumn. So, come and talk to us.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Preached and Live streamed in Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 18th June 2023 by Rev. Ian Phillips.