

1 Cor. 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

Have you ever been tempted to read meaning into Scripture that eased your conscience or sense of inadequacy or even justified an opinion which differed from someone else?

This reading from 1 Cor. 1 is a perfect example, for me, of how that can happen!

I never excelled at school – as you can probably tell. Academia was a foreign country to me; actually it still is.

For years I tried to cover up my lack of education and consequently carried a great sense of inadequacy.

Then I came across this reading from Paul in 1 Cor. 1

“As the Scriptures say, I will destroy human wisdom
And discard their most brilliant ideas.”

He goes on

“So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made them all look foolish and has shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense.”

Well, I felt vindicated and began to speak enthusiastically about the fact that there was no need for learning or academic success, in fact it wasn’t important at all!

This train of thought did not go down particularly well with one of my closest friends who happened to be the town’s archivist and had an excellent degree from Leeds University. She was very clever. (Thinking back I’m surprised she remained a close friend but she did).

And of course this is just a classic example of how to misread the Scripture to suit ourselves.

I was only uneducated because I was too lazy to work at my studies. One of my teachers informed my parents that I was a “day dreamer.” One day,

aged about 5/6, I failed to return home from school and dad was sent to find me. He eventually discovered me in a nearby field making daisy chains. Needless to say this meditative attitude was not encouraged to develop.

So, years after when I eventually began training for Reader ministry, the study came hard but the joy it brought was indescribable. I am still aware I am lacking in many aspects of education but I no longer boast about it, or feel inadequate.

I wonder how many of us can remember school reports that read, “could do better.”

I now understand that Paul is not saying study and education is wrong, I think he is saying it's wrong when the message you have to give is hidden by your trying to impress people with what you know. He is saying it is possible to spend a lifetime accumulating knowledge and yet never learn how to have a personal relationship with Jesus, and that is sad.

No matter whether we are gifted with intellectual ability, or not, the important thing is to understand that God wants us to have a personal relationship with him through getting to know Jesus.

Many Jews considered the Good News of Jesus to be foolish because they understood, from their interpretation of O.T. Scripture, that the Messiah, when he came, would be a conquering hero King, not an itinerant teacher who preached love and forgiveness as the way to salvation.

And as a final proof, to them, he was crucified as a criminal, how could a criminal be the long awaited Saviour?

The Greeks also considered the Good News of Jesus to be foolish. They did not believe in bodily resurrection of the dead, so the reports of his resurrection were not considered authentic. They too considered the fact that he had been crucified was proof that he had been defeated not victorious.

The Good News we preach as Christians still sounds foolish to many people today. Our society worships wealth and power not humility and sacrifice.

What is missing from the modern understanding is that completeness of self on earth and salvation can never be earned or seen as success. The only way to salvation is by having a personal relationship with God and we do that by following Jesus. That is the wisdom that the world struggles with and is the greatest wisdom anyone can ever know.

Intellectual ability is indeed a wonderful gift and when undergirded with the wisdom brought through the awareness of God in us can be used, by the Holy Spirit, in powerful empowering ways e.g in government, teaching, medicine, business and many more areas.

As we look at John we see how again we can translate Scripture. In a way to suit ourselves. We can read the account, from John, of Jesus in the Temple, as an example of how “righteous” anger can be used to justify violence.

Everything that Jesus did had a meaning and although Jesus was angry, I don't think this shocking act recorded in John was a sudden reaction of anger.

To the Jews the Temple was the focal point of worship. This was the place where God dwelt, and the time was Passover. An important festival of celebrating God's goodness and mercy to their ancestors, and they had turned it into a marketplace, but not just that, the traders were dealing dishonestly with those who had come to worship.

The money changers were charging ridiculous rates, the animal merchants were charging much, much more for the sacrificial animals than their true price, and so were fleecing the people who had travelled many miles and were unable to transport their own animals for sacrifice.

At this holy time of Passover, God's house was being made a mockery of.

Jesus was not simply angry at what was happening on that particular day but at the way Passover had been sidelined in order to feed the greedy and unscrupulous.

When questioned by the leaders what authority he had to do what he had done he replied, “ All right, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise

it up.” Of course, the leaders assumed he meant the actual building, which had taken 46 years to complete and so they mocked him.

We now understand that Jesus was referring to himself as the Temple, carrying God’s authority, prophesying about his resurrection from the dead.

The Temple was an imposing building that was very important to them, much more important than Jesus or his message.

Is there anything in our own lives that is so important that we put it before worshipping, without really understanding what we are doing?

The Jews had got used to Passover and become comfortable with the memory of what happened to their nation. They were happy to continue as they were until the conquering hero, they understood the Old Testament prophets had spoken about, appeared.

Have we become comfortable with the understanding of today’s society in respect to salvation? Have we become comfortable with our own experience of meeting with Jesus? Are we becoming comfortable in using the church building purely as a place to socialise or can we remember that burning passion to preach the Good News, feed the poor and heal the broken hearted.

The last twelve months have not been easy for anybody but we are beginning to be hopeful that later this year we will once again be able to meet in God’s house as we once did to fully worship God together, in prayer, teaching and song, as well as opening it up to serve the community and strengthen our relationships with each other. through social events.

We are also hopeful that in a few months we will have a new vicar to work with us and we pray that he/she and we, together, will be blessed with a new energy to advance God’s Kingdom in this place, through the passion for Jesus to be found in our relationship with him.

A good way to spend time in Lent is by looking back at all the times we feel we have met with Jesus, and how that felt at the time, and writing all those

experiences down. Then maybe one day we can spend some time sharing with each other just how awesome and yet how personal God is.

Amen.