Sunday 19th October HOW IS THE OLD TESTAMENT STILL RELEVANT FOR US TODAY

Part One: The Old Testament (OT) with reference to Jesus.

We look at Isaiah, especially the ‘poems’, and find many quotes which, in hindsight we see as foretelling Jesus. For example, Isaiah Ch9: verses 1-6 which we hear at Christmas Midnight Mass and the Servant songs, the fourth of which (Is 52:13-53:12) we hear on Good Friday.

Psalm 22(21), which in Matthew Jesus quotes from the cross, illustrates how our knowledge or lack of knowledge of the OT can influence our perception of what is being said. The psalm starts ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Matthew wrote for the Jewish people, so his hearers would know the whole psalm and would know that it ends in a shout of triumph.

Part two: Various thoughts on the Old Testament

1. “The Book that’s Reading Me”
2. The OT shows the development in faith of a people
3. This mirrors our development in faith.
4. The OT is not all about wars and battles.
5. Genesis Chapter 1: Creation is good, vegetarian, the animals are neither eaten or eat each other.
6. Genesis Chapter 2: Adam means man. We are born good, but we are given free will and we mess up.
7. We grow in faith. We learn to know that God is faithful and we can trust Him.
8. Our understanding of God’s love for us grows.
9. We gradually come to a greater understanding of our place in God’s world.
10. We turn more and more towards trusting in and living in God as He lives in us.
11. As we allow God to live and work in us we take God out to the world.
12. Well, that’s the theory!! That’s the plan.

As we read the OT we find a people who begin to carry out this plan, but sometimes their story seems to be one step forward and two steps back, just as our own faith journey can often be.

We have to remember that much of the OT was written long after the events described. Although many of the stories were passed down by word of mouth for centuries, when they were written down they were written for the people who were alive at the time when they were written.

Much of the ‘history’, more properly called the early prophets, was told/written to encourage the people, to remind them of all the things that God had done for them. We often need reminding that God is involved in our lives. When things are going wrong we might need reminding that God is with us.

Because of the level of their faith, the people thought of the Covenant as an agreement, if they kept their part of the agreement then God would keep his. We know that God is always faithful, always love us, it only we who give upon Him.

The way that the prophets harangued the people when things were going wrong came out of their covenant/agreement view of the people’s relationship to God. We know now that God never gives upon us, He is always there, but if our lives are not in tune with God’s plan for the world then we will not be happy, if the world is not run in tune with God’s plan then there will be trouble. The tit for tat faith of the OT may no longer ring true for us but the message of the prophets often does.

The problem of evil exercises many minds. The book of Job approaches this.

The psalms straddle the whole gamut of emotions. They show us that prayer is not about repeating polite litanies but about a real, sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes angry, relationship with God. They include praise, sorrow and pleading.

Quotes used in morning prayer.

Wed Wk1 Tob 4:16-17, 19-20 (15-16, 18-19a)

Thurs Wk1 Is 66:1-2

Sun Wk2 Ezek 36:25-27

Mon Wk2 Jer 15:16

Sun Wk3 Ezek 37:12b-14

Wed Wk3 Job 1:21: 2:10b

Tues Wk4 Is 55:1

Wed Wk4 Deut 4:39-40a

Also:

Sun Wk1 & Wk3 Dan 3:57-88, 56 (Exhorts the whole of creation to praise God)

Mon Wk4 (eve) Psalm 135 (136) (Thanks and praise)

Sun Wk3 Psalm 148 (A hymn of praise)

Throughout the OT we find a people that is (overall) moving forward in their relationship with God. Initially they need clear guidance, rules, as do we when we are children. Gradually they, and we, learn, in the words of the prophet Micah, to act justly, to love tenderly and walk humbly with God.

Note Is 66:1-2 versus David being told he will not be the one build the temple and the people returning from exile being told off for building houses for themselves instead of rebuilding the temple. It’s about inner attitude. This comes out in the prophets over and over again, and is continued by Jesus.

The story of Gideon illustrates how we should rely on God’s strength, not on ours. We should be ready to do our best, but to follow God’s plan, not ours. ‘Our help is in the name of the Lord’.

That God’s salvation is for all people is illustrated in the story of Jonah, who was most indignant that God should wish to speak to and save the people of Ninevah, who were enemies of the Jewish people. Israel’s faith was very insular. They were the chosen people, they were the people to be saved. They forgot that if their God is the true God, then He is the God of the whole world, of all peoples. Do we recognise this today? Do we recognise our responsibility to spread the word?