

## Vicar's Letter – Summer 2019 'Encountering God'

### Dear Friends,

How do you encounter God? Encountering God is one of our core values and as such we want to encourage everyone to find that place of encounter.

For Moses, it was in the burning bush or the pillar of cloud or fire. For Elijah it was in the still small voice, a whisper. For the prophets it was often in a vision. To Solomon the Lord appeared in a dream promising to grant what he requested: wisdom. For Jacob, God appeared as a man with whom he wrestled all night long at Peniel. More than sixty times God is encountered as an 'angel of the Lord'. When this encounter takes place there is a sense of clarity as to what should happen next. When Abraham was about to sacrifice his son the angel of the Lord stopped him and commanded him not to harm the boy. Such encounters marked a turning point in the person's life. God gave orders or told the person what would happen in their future. When the person realised they were talking with God himself, they were often struck with terror, hiding their faces or shielding their eyes as Elijah did when he pulled his cloak over his head. Then they were usually told, 'Fear not!'

An angel of the Lord rescued Peter from gaol removing his chains and opening the cell door (Acts 12). There are still occasions today when followers of Jesus encounter God in dreams and visions, according to the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:17) and sometimes through the ministry of angels (Hebrews 13:2). Some people encounter God through the beauty of creation, walking the hills and valleys and becoming aware of God in the wonder of all that is around us. Others encounter God in silence and contemplation or in the beauty of art or music. There is no one correct way to encounter God. The important point is that we earnestly seek to do just that according to the way in which he has uniquely created and designed us.

Having said all that, we cannot underestimate that the primary way in which we encounter God is through reading, reflecting and meditating on his Word, the Bible. This is the reason why I constantly urge us all to adopt the practise of regular daily Bible reading and prayer. It is not about the amount we read, it is about the encounter we have. Quite often I have found the amount of scripture that needs to be read in order to get through the Bible in one year is too much to enable an encounter to take place. Sometimes it is better to focus on one verse or a shorter passage. The important point is not to become enslaved by a particular pattern or method but to feel free to swap and change and try different models in order to discover what works best for you.

Recently I was told about [www.wordlive.org](http://www.wordlive.org) a free online resource provided by Scripture union and I am enjoying a slightly different style of devotions to the usual BIOY (Bible in one year) which tends to be my default. There are many different aids to Bible reading out there. The important thing is to find one that suits you and enables you to have an encounter with God.

### Heading into the summer

As we move towards the summer break, why not resolve afresh to encounter God on a daily basis and record your encounters in a journal.

*'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'  
(Jeremiah 29:13).*

You might do this by:

- taking up an inspirational book to read or audio book to listen to.
- reading and reflecting on a portion of scripture every day asking the Holy Spirit to open your heart to receive from Him.
- listen to online sermons, podcasts, teaching resources that inspire you.
- as Jenny Green said the other week; recognise that we are all made in the image of God and therefore resolve to look for the divine spark in even the most unlikely of places.

Hopefully we may all have opportunity to adopt a slower pace of life and enjoy some space for family and recreation, so why not build into that some time for God?

Some of us will be participating in summer camps: New Wine, Keswick, Word Alive, Soul Survivor or any number of Scripture Union or Falcon Camps for children and teenagers. These are all great places for spiritual refreshment and deep nourishment. In whatever way you are spending this summer season, I hope it will be for you a time of deep encounter with the living God.

**Stephen**