**Sermon for 8.30am and 10am Sunday 16th August 2020**



**Theme:- *Why I am a Christian***

**Texts;-**

**Revelation 3:14-22**

**John 10:1-10**

**Prayer:-**

***May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing in your sight O Lord; our Rock and our Redeemer***

***Amen***

**Introduction**

Good morning everyone – good to be here talking to you this morning (in church/at home)

I am continuing with the theme ‘Why am I a Christian’ The last of 7!

**Am I a Christian because I was baptised here? (in December 1945)**

1. ***Show photo of the font***

I think that the font was then located in the North aisle.

When I was researching a project for college I found the service in the church register! (Now in Chester archives).

My mum wasn’t well so wasn’t present – my dad had to run home to check on my names!!

My middle name was to be Anita or Annetta after twin daughters of an American serviceman who became a family friend during WW2

Guess which name it was to be? Annetta…

**So – did I become a Christian then? I think that there was a lot** **in between**

As a baby my godparents took my baptismal vows for me (one of my godparents – my Auntie Migs, is still alive - we celebrated her 100th birthday in February!

**I think that It started me on my Christian journey** and I was to make my Christian commitment as an adult – in this church but not until many years later:-

**I was confirmed in May 1993**

1. ***Show picture – confirmation book (explain surname was Burgess then)***

**Quite a gap in between!**

**So what happened ?**

I enjoyed a very happy childhood (Which you may have read about in my book *‘Sweet Scented Manuscript of Youth’* which I sold in aid of church funds.)

I explain in my book that although I have always believed in God I hadn’t really understood the Christian message until a

**Significant happening when I was about 10 years old:-**

I was looking through a book of prints (which I still have) of famous paintings and I came across:

**the picture ‘ The Light of the World’ by Holman Hunt**

1. ***Show Picture – The Light of the World***

**Explain.**

I couldn’t understand what it was all about until my mum explained the meaning of it to me. **I think that this was a ‘light bulb’ moment’! for me.**

‘**The Light of the World’**

Painted by Holman Hunt in1854 There is more than one copy, one in St Paul’s cathedral, the original in Keble College, Oxford and another version in Manchester City Art Gallery – I was able to attend an exhibition of all 3 paintings at Manchester Art gallery, with my late husband, David, about 15 years ago. They even had the lamp on display which Holman Hunt copied for his painting!!

**Connect with Bible texts.**

The picture is based on a verse from the New Testament, Revelation 3:20: which we heard earlier as one of our readings –

 ***“Here I am! I stand at the door and* *knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,* *I will come in and eat with him, and he with me”***

My mum explained that apparently Holman Hunt intended to show Jesus Christ standing outside the door to the individual’s heart. The door may never have been opened. The doorway is overgrown with weeds and there is no handle visible.

As a consequence Jesus can only knock, but it is up to the individual to open the door and to trust “The Light of the World” with His symbolic lantern to guide him or her through the darkness of the world outside!

**Spot the 2 copies of this picture in church! Baptistry and Lady Chapel…….**

 **John Ruskin expands on this explanation:- (leave out at 8.30am)**

***He refers to the door as the human soul which is ‘fast barred’ with rusty bars and nails.***

***‘It is knitted and bound to its stanchions by creeping tendrils of ivy, showing that it has never been opened. Christ approaches it in the night time, in His everlasting offices of Prophet, Priest and King. He wears the white robe representing the power of the Spirit upon Him; the jewelled robe and breastplate representing the sacerdotal investiture’*** *(sacrament means ‘mystery’ as sacraments are the means by which Christians partake in the mystery of Christ)*

***‘The rayed crown of gold, interwoven with the crown of thorns, but bearing soft leaves for the healing of the nations. He bears with him the twofold light; first the light of conscience, which displays past sin, and, afterwards the light of peace, the hope of salvation.’***

Gosh! this certainly made a big impression on me at the time. Although I wasn’t aware of John Ruskin’s explanation, then. My mum’s words were much more understandable to a 10 year old!

**In any case**

**The penny dropped –** I finally understood thatbeing a Christian was not a passive thing – it involved welcoming Christ into my life and being willing to follow Him.

Alongside this realisation –

I have always appreciated nature and the great outdoors. As a family we went on country walking holidays every year, often in the Lake District from when I was 8 years old.

**So I am also**

**A Christian because I see God’s creation all around**

1. ***Show picture – countryside***

I took this photo in April 2019 just outside Coniston in the Lake District

I have so many fond memories of those holidays. I enjoyed the actual walking/climbing for its own sake (which I still do!) but I also enjoyed the spiritual side.

HF was founded originally on the basis of Fellowship and the opportunity to enjoy God’s creation. There were many (and still are) HF houses all over the country (and they go abroad now too!) which offered affordable holidays for ordinary people. They were also teetotal!

Grace was said before meals and a short, optional, worship service took place before breakfast each day, consisting of a Bible reading, prayer and a song.

Would you believe? I still have a copy of the HF songbook from all those years ago!

1. ***Show Picture – HF songbook and hymn***

In this picture I also show the words of one of the hymns/songs we used to sing *‘For the Beauty of the Earth’* which we heard earlier.

I well remember sitting on a window seat in the lounge of one of those houses clutching my song book and gazing out at the hills and mountains around (which we would climb that day) and giving thanks to our creator God.

It all made perfect sense to me!

**So how did this all pan out?**

Sadly, I lost my way many times, over the years, because of circumstances and my making unwise decisions.

I have been widowed once and divorced twice and have suffered from anxiety and depression most of my adult life. I thought that Jesus would not be interested in me because I was so bad and made such stupid decisions at times. (I hasten to add that my last marriage to David was not one of those! but I think, an answer to prayer!)

**How wrong can you be?**

I had failed to understand that Jesus died for us all, whatever we have done, he forgives our misdoings and particularly looks after the lost, lonely and hopeless…

However, it wasn’t until after a spell in the psychiatric unit at Clatterbridge hospital suffering with anxiety and depression that I was moved to start attending this church again; nearly 30 years ago!

I had received a Parish Christmas Card from this church which said:- ***Christ Church is not a Holy Club but is your Parish Church to which you are invited….***

I took up the invite, ringing the then curate, and attending services which all resulted in my strengthening faith and eventual calling to be a Reader – Lay minister, here at Christ Church. I was licenced in Chester Cathedral 13 years ago.

**I am a Christian because I am convinced Jesus is the Son of God and has sent the Holy Spirit to help us.**

1. ***Show picture – the Holy Spirit***

**I can say the creed with conviction – which I struggled with for a long time I have to say.**

**Even though I have lived through some tough times I do believe that God does not want us to suffer. In our Gospel reading Jesus says that he has come so that we can ‘have life to the full’**

**God helps us find good things out of bad - Romans 8:28:- *In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose…***

**I have been able to put my experiences to good use –** eg I have been involved in running the Oasis group here atchurch, since 2010 – aiming to help people achieve mental well being.

**Our challenge today:-**

**Not only to open our own door to Jesus but to take that love to others.**

**During the Pandemic I have been phoning folk to check they are OK but most often, on my daily exercise walk, I have knocked on their front door and had a chat through their window or on the step!**

**I may well have been speaking to some of you!**

**Conclusion**

**I am a Christian – trying to follow Christ, because I have come to believe in Him totally and see evidence of God’s creation all around!**

**During the Lockdown we heard the birdsong so clearly and appreciated the blossom on the trees**

**I have been helped so much over the years by friends, family, clergy and fellow Christians and I hope to be able to help others in turn – spreading God’s love through the world…**

**I finish with a couple of questions:-**

1. ***Show picture – open and closed doors***

**Is your door open to Christ today?**

**Will you reach out to others to help them open their door too?**

**Amen…**