

GOAT AND COMPASS

Bible Sunday this week; I wonder who decided on all these "special" Sundays which knock out the regular march of Trinity numbers. Some are obvious, like Harvest, Plough, Rogation; but some are worthy but very oddly placed; you (sorry, **I**) would have thought Education Sunday would come in at the beginning or end of the academic year! Anyhow, Bible Sunday it is, though we are given 4 bits of Bible to read every Sunday anyhow; it's good to read them all, not just the one we happen to preach about.

It may not be immediately obvious why we are given Nehemiah today - the story of the official reading of a reinstated book of the Jewish bible after their return to Jerusalem from exile; but I note that the authorities thought it wise and suitable to have a squad of tutors or interpreters scattered among the faithful to make sure they all got the right end of the stick of these new rules of observance. My memory seems to tell me that it was probably Leviticus that they found in an old cupboard somewhere, but whatever it was it had to be explained properly. One of the NT letters says "No Scripture is of private interpretation", which is why I am uneasy when a discussion includes the words "The Bible says"; it can often usher in a single quotation, out of context, to support a doubtful opinion, a process better left to the politicians.

The bible is a collection of pamphlets written by a number of God-inspired authors on the general theme of "How God has helped us to know Him better over the centuries of history". These writings need respect, explanation and study. The choice of which writings should get in the Bible was also part of God's inspiration. We are indebted to all those good and wise and largely holy writers. There is no magic here; Matthew's second name was not Merlin. This still needs saying. Ancient Rome used to seek the future by sticking a pin at random into Vergil's books and seeing what it said; that attitude has not gone away, people still try the same idea with the Bible – ***The church brings luck!*** A chaplain at Monte Carlo told me they have no hymn boards in the church there because the services were continually disturbed by people opening the door to see the "lucky numbers" on their way to the Casino near-by!

By now you, my reader, may be wondering about the title at the head of these thoughts. It is one of a number of popular misrepresentations of unusual names of pubs; the real version is "***God encompasseth us***". I regret to say that the evidence shows that in fact no pub with that name actually exists. But after all a good story must not be allowed to go to waste and I suggest that the words are an ideal summary or title for the words of Holy Scripture.

The Bible is the tale of how God has and does indeed encompass us through all times and seasons. We are blessed to have it in front of us. We must not take it for granted or misuse it.

Thanks be to Him

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