

We are humans. Mostly. So it is the trivial and the trifling, the circumstantial and colourful that have the sharpest hooks and the strongest hold in our minds.

Think about what you remember of the past. Your memories will be, yes, of the big stuff, and then lots and lots of irrelevant detail: the mood of a September afternoon thirty years ago, a particular pair of shoes you once wouldn't be seen out of, that tune on the radio, the pattern on the curtains in your bedroom, the way the sunlight hit the carpet when you heard the news. It is the trivial and the trifling, the circumstantial and colourful that have the sharpest hooks and the strongest hold in our minds

This is how you can tell that the Bible- and especially the New Testament- was written by humans: by the obsessional inclusion of trivia, the love of local colour, the infatuation with irrelevant details and the addiction to gossip.

Sometimes this sort of stuff- what colour the dress was, or what the weather was like- is rich with symbolism or even irony: mostly it isn't, it is just trivia. So do we really need to know that before the stilling of the storm Jesus was sleeping on a cushion? That a young man ran away naked from the garden of Gethsemane? That Joanna- who she? was the wife of Herod's steward Chuza- who he? That Simon of Cyrene not only carried the Cross but was also, the father of Alexander and Rufus? That that formerly blind beggar had a name- Bartimeus and so did his father- Timaeus, and when the 5000 were fed we had that many fish (who had faces but not names) and that many of this sort of loaves? Is it essential to the tale to know that Zaccheus didn't just climb any old tree to see Jesus but a sycamore? Of course it couldn't have been a monkey puzzle or a bonsai tree, but why bother to remember — that it was a sycamore? Sycamores were not symbolic before Zaccheus climbed one, unless you count old Testament prophet Amos dressing them, which is a pretty bizarre pastime if you ask me that might just get you locked up. The Bible includes all this stuff- the names of cameo characters, the species of tree, the type of bread, the figurehead on the ship that took Paul to Syracuse- because... that's just what humans are like, and that's just the sort of stuff humans like and that inessential colour is how the stories become more vivid, memorable, meaningful and important to us.

When you notice that, that's how you can tell the Bible was written by humans.

Also, a pretty good clue is that the Bible is a *book*, not a 10 meter high black obsidian obelisk or a tablet of flaming gold or something written in the amplitude of the waves of the ocean or carved on the back of a small beetle scuttling under a leaf in the Amazonian rain forest.

And it's written like that because in the incarnation God became human in Jesus. It's written like that because the God who meets us where we are that first Christmas day- as well as keeping an eye on the gentle curves of space, the grinding orbits of the cosmic spheres, and whatever lives in the rotting biomass on the forest floor- is obsessively concerned with other humans, as all human beings are. Fully divine and fully human.

To know that obsessive concern, we simply have to look at Jesus' ministry on earth and see that nothing human was too small, nobody was too irrelevant or circumstantial for his attention. 'Hey, I'm God incarnate- don't worry me about that! Speak to the hand' Only at the very beginning and the very end does Jesus meet with the bigwigs: the kings, the governors, the high priests. The rest of the time it's the nobodies that get all of Jesus's attention: children and women, beggars and lepers, the sick and the bereaved, fishermen, rent boys- that's what the man scarpering without his togs was in Mark's gospel- provincial tax collectors and Peter's mother in law. When it came to people, Jesus had excellent peripheral vision. The most highest-ranking person Jesus meets on his treks through provincial Palestine is a centurion with a somewhat un-Roman- more 'Greek' shall we say devotion to his sick slave. Not exactly the top of the A-list. But that's who Jesus chose to spend his time with. The unnoticed and the unimportant; the trivial and the forgotten. Those who were nothing, were everything. That, at ground level, is what incarnation actually means.

Now I wouldn't want you to go away this evening thinking that I've been suggesting that obsession with trivia is a good thing - it isn't, particularly at a PCC meeting. And I'm not suggesting that God is small minded or that we need to dignify the smallest of our obsessions with God's omniscient attention: indeed, not a sparrow is forgotten in God's sight, but possibly he's not over concerned with our lipstick or whether we're going to get a parking space. He allowed the council to slather double yellow lines all over Church Road so probably parking is not priority number one in the courts of Heaven.

What I want you to ponder, is that the fact that somebody bothered to record the kind of tree somebody once climbed in order to see Jesus, tells us something very

important about our God. And what that titbit of trivia tells us is that salvation has come to *humanity*. To us. With our love of the trivial and the trifling, the circumstantial and colourful; salvation has come to us.