

There is usually something left out. Be it the final screw when assembling IKEA furniture, the pieces of the jigsaw, half the scenes from the director's cut, a couple of songs on the album, a scene from the play, there's always something missing. Much of the time we don't notice these omissions. There may be good reasons for their absence. The songs left off the Beatles albums for example, are simply not that good; put back the scenes cut from the Lord of the Rings films and the films extends to the impossible length of the Ring Cycle. For a politician it's a survival skill to be able to deliver a convincing 30 minute speech that omits not just the inconvenient facts but everything else as well. Good reasons can be found for leaving things out.

Or there may be no good reasons for those absences but they are there as a fixture of life and we muddle along anyway pretty much oblivious. If you were to drive from here to Cambridge, say, or even better Walsingham, you wouldn't blink when the road signs you have been religiously following for the past few hours suddenly disappear at a roundabout 5 miles from your destination. Such is the British way. We are so used to this we barely notice anything missing. Think what shared cultural experiences the satnav is destroying.

Gaping gaps and things left unsaid, can be found, or should that be 'not found' in some surprising places. One of the biggest omitters of things, unexpectedly perhaps given their unique place in our faith, are our sacred scriptures.

While the Bible is unabashed about telling us at great length the best way to seek, select, sacrifice and then burn a young red heifer, it is much more coy when it comes to describing how Abraham might have felt when he was told to sacrifice Isaac his son. *That* is left out. Although the Biblical voice has no hesitation in telling us at loud volume what not to wear... and eat... and marry and say...and do... we are not told how Noah and family amused themselves for forty days afloat (there's only so many board games you can play and retain your composure), how they managed the menagerie, how they felt about being the only ones left to start it all again, how they felt when they realised everything they had ever known was gone. That too is left out.

All through those great epics of Ancient Israel there is extreme taciturnity about individual feelings and reactions. The characters have a mindbogglingly limited range of emotional responses, there is an absence of even vaguely subtle nuances - leaping around with joy or tearing your clothes and daubing yourself with ashes seem to be

the only available scripts for the actors in our Biblical dramas: it's all the stylised 2D stock of melodrama: *opera seria* in a language that sounds like somebody spitting.

This extremely narrow range and depth of expression is not something, certainly, limited to the grand sweeping narratives of the Old Testament. The New Testament is, in all sorts of ways, an extension of the Old, and all this almost reticent tight-lipped telling of the tale spills over into our gospels.

People react to and are affected by Jesus in all manner of astonishing ways... a leper is cleansed, a demon exorcised, a life healed... and then the story gallops quickly on. No time to consider what the man blind from birth does next, we don't come back twenty years later to see how the Gerasene demoniac has rebuilt his life. Peter's mother in law does not tell her tale of the day Jesus healed her fever, there is no sequel showing us what-Pilate-did-next, at least not in any recognised canon of scripture.

For peoples with a literary culture, this can make the Jewish-Christian scriptures difficult to deal with. St Augustine, the father of Western theology was for a long time scathing of the crudeness of our Bible. And for a people whose cultural pinnacle is generally agreed to be William Shakespeare, our scriptures- even in the lavish literary world of Authorised Version English- can be disconcerting indeed. From lowbrow to highbrow, from 4th century Hippo to 21st century Beddington we are used to certain literary conventions. From the sublimities of Proust to the vulgarities of Jeffrey Archer, from Jane Austen's bonnets to Mills & Boons' frilly bits we are entirely accustomed to literature which deals with characters' inner lives; their inner dialogues, motivations and doubts; at length and in detail. But we will not find these in our Scriptures.

Jesus in the gospels seems to be the only 3D figure moving in a world of flat characters. Our gospel reading this morning tells us of the calling of the first disciples. It is terse. On a literary level it is deeply unsatisfactory. Jesus calls the disciples, they leave what they are doing and follow him. Why? What did they feel? What on earth motivated them? What did Zebedee feel as he watched his sons drop everything and leave him there and then? It is a story which almost demands expansion, it demands explanation and the Gospel point blank refuses. Stripped to the bare minimum of detail we are tersely told: Jesus calls, the disciples follow. None of our Gospels, not even the elegantly Greek Luke would ever get a sniff at the Booker prize.

But of course our scriptures are not literature like any other. Despite the occasional similarities of forms- poetry, history, songs, novels even- it is writing with a difference. The purpose of our scriptures and our gospels especially so, is not to entertain us, to amuse or divert us; it is not even, like our standard history books, to inform us or like our Highway code to tell us the most appropriate thing to do in a given practical situation. They may do these things by the by, but the sole purpose of our Scriptures is to allow us to meet our God. They are the answer we have been given when we remake in our time the declaration of the Greeks in Jerusalem to Philip 'we would see Jesus'.

And so to meet Jesus we need to to enter into the gospels and to do that we need space, we need the characters to move aside and to make room for us. Were our gospels stuffed with brilliantly exhaustive characterisations with full, lively, rounded, BIG personalities, how could we find a way in? Could we anywhere near as easily fit into Peter's big clumsy feet, into Thomas's doubt, Mary Magdalene's joy if we knew all about them, their motivations, their life stories, their husbands, wives and lovers, mothers in law and sons and daughters, what they ate for breakfast and what they *really* thought about the important issues of the day?

So the disciples leave what they are doing and follow Jesus. If our gospels told us of Peter's reasons, thoughts, emotions, motivations it might be informative, it might be fascinating, it could even be great psychology but it would not help us to see Jesus. It would help us to see Peter. So Peter and Andrew, James and John follow Jesus; they say little, they step aside and they let us in. And so we can ask ourselves the very same question that we might long to ask them; why did you follow Jesus?

Each of us will have our own answer, each our own story to tell of the day we heard the voice say 'follow me'; and why we did. Even in this island nation probably no-one was mending their nets when they got the call. Most of us are sublimely unaware of anything quite as obvious as a moment of calling in our lives. Faith might have just snuck up on us, church may have been something that seems natural, that we do, that we have always done. Nothing as dramatic as upping and leaving your boat and family on the shore; nothing as vulgar as being knocked off your horse. You are, however, here on a Sunday morning and unless you're having a severe senior moment or sheltering from the cold (in which case you've picked the wrong place for a quiet life), that is because Jesus has said to you 'Follow me'. And just like Peter and Andrew, James and John, you have.

Short, terse, flat and crude our Bible, our Gospels have almost everything left out. And that is because what they do leave in there is the only thing, in the end, that matters. They let us see Jesus.