



Rev Dave Brown  
Rector of St Nicholas Stevenage & St Mary Graveley  
2a North Road, Stevenage. Herts. SG1 4AT  
Tel: 01438 213587  
Email: [revdmbrown@gmail.com](mailto:revdmbrown@gmail.com)



**Briefing 39: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2020.**

Dear friends,

### **The Power of Story**

I don't know about you, but I'm a Lord of the Rings fan. Earlier this year I listened to all 3 books again, and followed it up with an excellent biography of JRR Tolkien. The movies are great too, but they only work because of the powerful story they have to tell. A story with strong, almost unmissable, Christian overtones.

Tolkien was a committed Roman Catholic, but he frequently stated that he did not set out to write an allegory of the Christian faith when writing the trilogy. Instead, he argued that the power of the Christian story was so strong that it thrust itself onto his writing. And so in the world of the Lord of the Rings we have a battle between good and evil, we find a Christ-like prophet in Gandalf who speaks the truth and helps his companions understand the present and future; a Christ-like king in Aragorn, who descends to the realm of the dead before leading his people to victory; and a Christ-like priest in Frodo, who willingly sacrifices himself to save others. Such is the beauty of the writing, the strength of Tolkien's faith and the power of the Christian story, that when you read the books, or even watch the films, with your eyes open, you see the glorious truths of the gospel brought to light in a new way. *(If you'd like to think a little more about the gospel shining through the Lord of the Rings, and CS Lewis's Narnia, I've recently come across a set of excellent lectures that does just that. I've really enjoyed listening to these, and you might too: The link is here: <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/a-new-class-on-the-worlds-of-c-s-lewis-and-j-r-r-tolkien/>)*

Of course Gandalf, Aragorn and Frodo aren't exact representations of Jesus. So whilst reading the Lord of the Rings might remind us of wonderful Bible truths, and help us to grasp them more fully, if we want the truth we need to go to God's story; we need to go to the Scriptures.

In this column last week I wrote about the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith report which has just been published. Over the last week I've sat in on 3 briefings and read various articles about that publication. And what is very clear, is that story, the stories of individuals and couples take a starring role. As I've already said, stories are wonderful; they can convey truth and impact our hearts in a way that statements of fact struggle to do. I'm sure that one of the reasons Jesus spoke in parables is because such stories are memorable and they help bring truth to life. As long as, that is, the story being told is true. Otherwise, whilst our hearts and emotions might be touched and our sense of compassion and empathy raised up, our minds will be being stretched out of shape.

Within Living in Love and Faith there are many stories, many written down, many others told in well produced videos. They will be stories from old people and young people, married people, single people, gay people, trans people, celibate people from across the UK and across the theological divide. As you read or watch their stories, I'm sure, like me, your hearts will go out to these people as they speak about the struggles, pain and sometimes joys they have faced in their lives. And that's right and good.

All people are made in the image of God. All people deserve our respect and compassion. All people are worthy of being listened to. The question is, how do we judge the validity of the story they tell? Their stories will all be personal, how much weight should we give to the lessons they want us to learn from their story? That's something we need to think through very carefully before we engage in this process. But it's a lesson we need to be thinking about all the time, because our culture, our media, and our government are all constantly telling us stories about life, and values and right and wrong.

As Christians, we have a unique plumbline to hold up to all these competing stories; a yardstick by which to measure their truth content and to help us think through our response. That plumbline, that yardstick, is of course the Bible: God's true and reliable self-revelation, which not only reveals him to us, but helps us see ourselves in our rightful place. Unchanging, without error, speaking and applying God's authoritative truth to this in every generation, is the Bible story which helps us see the truth, or error, in every other story. Let's make sure we are living, and thinking, using the Bible's perfect light.

# IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**OUR SUNDAY SERVICE** for the benefice will be broadcast live on YouTube at 10 AM on Sunday morning. If you haven't done so already, you might find it helpful to subscribe to our YouTube channel which you can find here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAalRTsJuKFRBvkJAtQ> this week, our focus will be Matthew 13: 44 – 58.

**LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH:** For a short (30 minutes) introduction to LLF you can do no better than to watch this excellent film produced by the Church of England Evangelical Council. This film will take you through the content of the report, what *will* happen next and what *might* happen after that. You can access the film via the CEEC website at [www.CEEC.info](http://www.CEEC.info) or on YouTube here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI8bb65vOiE&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI8bb65vOiE&feature=emb_logo)

**HOME GROUPS:** Not in a home group? Want some extra Christian Fellowship? Join the group meeting on alternate Monday evenings at 7:30pm. We will be working through the New City Catechism (questions and answers that give us a foundation for our Christian faith), praying together, and reflecting on the Sunday sermon. We meet on Zoom, so do email Dave if you'd like to join in. There is lots of room! Open to people from both churches of course!

**PRAY WITH US! TOMORROW NIGHT** we'll be praying again via ZOOM from 7:45-9pm. Join us as we pray for the work and witness of the church in our benefice, across the country and around the world. Contact Dave on for a link. Alternatively, you can follow the resources attached to this email.

**WAYS TO GIVE:** Our churches still have costs to cover, even when we are not meeting in our buildings. So if you do not already give by direct debit, why not consider setting one up. It's very easy. Get in touch with me and I'll send you the appropriate forms. Alternatively, both churches have ways to give on line, with just a few clicks.

For St Mary's, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/fcb2cb18-94af-4c38-8b07-1471769b64c8>

For St Nicholas, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/5f594bca-73e3-426b-82f0-c46e9bfa2e96>

**FREE BOOK:** One of the best books I've read for ages is **Through Gates of Splendour by Elisabeth Elliot**. Telling the story of the 5 young American missionaries martyred by Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador, this book will inspire and challenge you to follow Jesus, whatever the cost. I have 8 copies going free- just give me a call or send me an email or stop by the Vicarage.

**OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD:** The lockdown has meant a delay to the collection of shoeboxes, but once the lockdown has been lifted, there will be a lot to do and Stuart will be looking for volunteers to man the church and welcome the boxes in from 5<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> December, 10am-4pm. In the meantime, why not pack a box online without visiting the shop, or start to put your own box together. Details of all those things are below.

- To watch the **inspiring video** again see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5VVDymhGr4>
- **To volunteer** to help with receiving boxes at the Church contact Stuart via [enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk)
- To find out what you **can and can't put in your boxes:** click here: <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/how-to-pack-a-shoebox/>
- To **pack a box online** without visiting a shop, click here: <https://shoeboxonline.samaritans-purse.org.uk/>

There are still plenty of flat-pack boxes and leaflets available in both churches- do remember to collect one if you'd like to. There will also be some leaflets if you struggle to make the links work.

**CHRISTMAS CAROLS:** We may not be able to sing in church at Christmas – but we can sing outside, socially distanced of course! So far there are two opportunities to do so, with hopefully more to come

Saturday 5 December (*the day before St Nicholas Day*) between 11am-12noon. There will also be a drop off point for food for the Stevenage Food Bank. Bring some food, and come and join us as we sing.

Wednesday 23 December at 3pm in the courtyard at Pine Lodge Care Home!

There will be a further update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*