

SERMON – 2ND OF ADVENT – 061220 – ISAIAH 40, MARK 1

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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What a week – another one. Light at the end of the tunnel, but the tunnel seems very long. There's a bit of me which says – Put on a recording of “Comfort thee my people” from Handel’s Messiah, and we’ll sit and listen to that. I couldn’t find a copyright fee version to play on Zoom, but there’s a lovely setting on youtube which you can find if you use my printed Order on the website. Music and laughter and love and being together will be the comfort we need – our job is to share the music, laughter, love and be together (virtually if necessary).



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I told you back in the summer that I had signed up to “The Reformation in Ten Books”, a course from University of York Continuing Learning, and I’ve spent my last ten Monday evenings doing that. Dr Francesca Cioni has taken us through wonderful material – starting the with Bible, ending with Milton’s “Paradise Lost”, with everything from Foxe’s “Book of Martyrs”, Christopher Marlowe, George Herbert, and the sheets produced by ballad singers in between.



*Reproduction of Gutenberg-era Press on display at Printing History Museum in Lyon, France.
Taken by George H. Williams in July, 2004 - <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gutenberg.press.jpg>*

It was an amazing time in human history. Not just the religious and political upheavals, but also the technological upheaval. The invention of the printing press, the publishing of books, printing of bible and prayer books. I'm so used to piles of books all over the Vicarage, can you imagine the first time a printed bible was taken into Allestree Vicarage (thinking about it, can you imagine the first time there was a Vicar's wife in Allestree – no doubt there were some who shook their heads and thought that was a really bad idea!). You can imagine people learning to read, perhaps my predecessor taught them.



Five weeks ago we learned about a lady called Elizabeth Grymeston. Born around 1563 in Gunton in Norfolk – and as I haven't got a picture of her, here's one of Gunton railway station, it's on the line from Norwich to Sheringham.



Gonville & Caius College

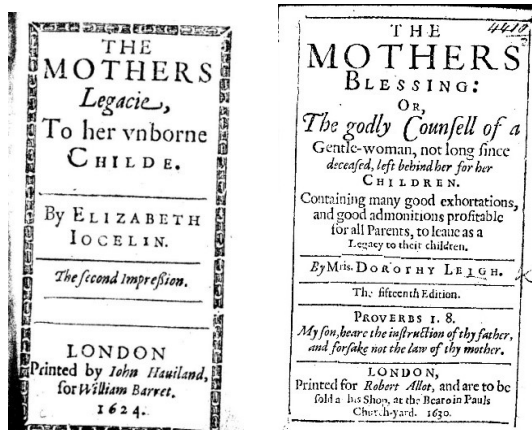
Photograph taken by Chris Haung, taken in 2010

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/huangcjz/5800109291>

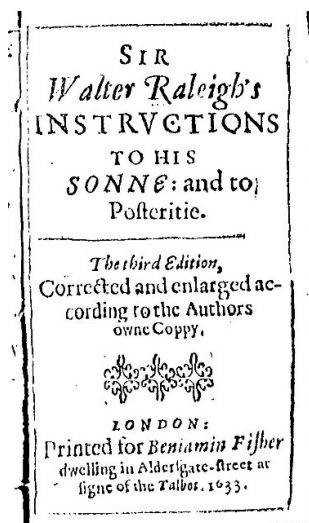
In 1584 she married Christopher Grymeston who had just received his Bachelor of Arts at Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge. He remained there to get his Masters, and then became a Fellow of the College – he was bursar in 1588. The little information we have suggests that the marriage was under a lot of strain – apparently her mother was difficult, and Christopher, as Fellow of a Cambridge College, had to live in College and was not allowed to be married. It seems that for 8 years they kept their marriage quiet, living apart, living in secret – we can imagine the strain. Another source of strain was that they had nine children – only one of whom, a son called Bernye, survived – I don't think any of us can know that strain. In a lighter thought, did you know Bernye was a Sixteenth Century name?

“My dearest sonne, there is nothing so strong as the force of loue; there is no loue so forcible as the loue of an affectionate mother to hir naturall childe: there is no mother can either more affectionately shew hir nature, or more naturally manifest hir affection, then in aduising hir children out of hir owne experience, to eschewe euill, and encline them to do that which is good”

During her life, Elizabeth wrote her thoughts, her advice, her guidance for her son – and after she died in 1603, her writings were published in London the following year in a book called *Miscellanea. Meditations. Memoratives*. She wrote to her son with the words above.



She wasn't the only woman to produce something like this. Here's a book written Elizabeth Jocelin "The Mothers legacie to her unborne" child, printed in 1624 – of course, in those days, every mother-to-be, knew how dangerous it was to give birth, that she might never hold her child. Another one "The Mothers blessing, or The Godly counsell of a gentle-woman, not long since deceased, left behind her for her children", by Dorothy Leigh and printed in 1630.



Sir Walter Raleigh by Nicholas Hilliard - National Portrait Gallery

Men wrote too – Sir Walter Raleigh’s Instructions to his Sonne, and to posteritie, 1633. I like the idea of writing for posterity, just in case your son doesn’t bother to read it. All these authors were putting things together.

Elizabeth Grymston wrote *Miscellanea. Meditations. Memoratives* – Miscellanea were poems, quotes, moral advice, meditations on what others had written. Meditations were Scriptural, often with the Book of Psalms as a basis. Morning and evening psalms, the words written 2500 years before Elizabeth’s time, 3,000 years before our time – wonderful words which speak to us today. Memoratives were a collection of moral sayings – including one I liked, remembering that my official job title is Clerk in Holy Orders, the saying “Give a lazy clerk a lean fee” raised a smile!



You can imagine Elizabeth, and the others, reading with a pen in their hand. You didn’t just read, you read and took notes. Here are some notes made by one such author. Write them down, learn and benefit from them.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
Grant that we may in such wise hear them,
read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,
that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word,
we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



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When Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1555 – before he was put to death in the reign of Queen Mary – when he put The Book of Common Prayer together, the first English prayer book, when he wrote the prayers, the Collects, for each Sunday – he would have had this in mind when he wrote today’s Collect. “Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them”.



Duccio di Buoninsegna - The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel - National Gallery of Art
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio,_nativit%C3%A0_tra_i_profeti_isaia_e_giobbe.jpg

This Christmas, as every Christmas, we talk about the Word of God. Isaiah the prophet speaks God’s Word to us. He talks comfort, glory, that the Word of the Lord endures for ever. He uses that lovely image of the shepherd. When John the Baptist came, he takes the words of Isaiah and points to Jesus. He is the Word of God. Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest – not just words on a page, images on a screen, but the Messiah himself. Our Christmas experience may be different this year, but our experience of Christ needs to be as real as ever. This is Good News and, as we do every year, we rejoice in the Good News and share it with others.

Peter Barham, 2 December 2020