

5th Sunday of Easter**Holmbury****Acts 8:26- end****John 15:1-8**

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

I recently joined a book club in Abinger – partly to get to know people and partly because I’d lost the knack of reading for fun.

I’ve spent years knee deep in spiritual and theological books for my training – wrestling with doctrinal concepts and theories from Atonement to pre-destination and the more I learnt the less I seem to know!

I like an easy read. I’m especially keen on detective and murder mystery books – books where there is always a baddy, the plot is fairly straight forward

and the goody always wins and the baddy gets punished. These books are black and white and make sense. Always with a logical and inevitable conclusion.

It was a relief reading these rather than having to pause after every paragraph to inwardly digest some academic theologians convoluted point.

It was fun getting together with others to discuss the latest book and we shared what we got out of it, discussed the authors literary prowess, and had a laugh while doing it.

It's good to do these things with others.

When I first became a Christian it was suggested that I read the bible and pray – good first steps in any discipleship journey.

But when I tried to read the bible, I found it confusing, at times contradictory and far removed from my day to day life.

What was all the fuss about I thought?

The church I went to had 'Home groups'. These were small groups where people gathered in someone's home and read and studied the bible together. In my group we had all ages. I was a young mum at the time and brought my baby with me, there were older people too who had been on the journey a lot longer than me.

I listened and learned and shared my confusions and life struggles in that group and gradually the bible began to come alive and make a little more sense.

Without their love, support, patience and understanding I think the bible would have remained a mystery.

I made some of my best friends in that group and I still see them regularly.

Our passages in Acts and John remind me of these times.

I am reminded of the importance of community and friendships and the faithful disciples that have gone before me; how much we can learn from each other and – most importantly – that we cannot do this journey of faith on our own.

It begins with the Holy Spirit.

That inner nudge, that prompting that he gives us.

Philip responded to that nudge and obediently went and hovered next to the eunuch's carriage.

Must have been a bit odd really.

The eunuch was travelling on a deserted road, his head buried in the bible when suddenly this strange man pops up beside him and asks him “Do you understand what you are reading?”

But the Eunuch was hungry – he was hungry for knowledge and understanding and Philip, prompted by the Holy Spirit, sensed this and explained it all to him.

God placed these two people together at exactly the right time – the seeker and the guide.

The eunuch had the desire and Philip had the knowledge.

Together they were abiding in the word, they were bearing fruit as they read and talked together, as Philip unveiled the truth of the words of Isaiah.

I have found that if I am open to the desire that God places in my heart, he will provide the right person at the right time.

For me it was that first Home Group. People with more knowledge and more faith than I to guide me and open up the word of God.

Church once a week is not enough for us to grow and deepen our faith – it is a lovely tasty morsel, an appetiser, enough to whet our appetites, but I have found it is not enough to sustain me through the whole week.

I need to journey with friends, share my life with other Christians, talk openly about my struggles, my challenges.

It is hard to be a Christian in our world and we aren't meant to do it on our own – in fact I think it's almost impossible.

We grow as disciples by sharing our life with one another, wrestling with scripture together, helping each other and being vulnerable with each other.

This is community and here, as we abide in the vine Jesus is with us and the fruit will come.

The bible is not a murder mystery, it is not an easy read, it has been called the most dangerous book in the world – so we need help in discerning it, following it and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak through it.

But it is worth the effort, especially when we do it together.

Let us pray,

Father, your word at times is confusing and hard to comprehend. Give us, we pray, the desire to abide with you in your word, help us to be open to the people you put in our path to help us.

We desire more of you, more of your Holy Spirit,
would you help us and guide us as we discern your
will for our lives.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.