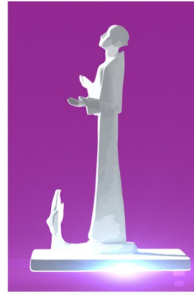


EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



Theme 4: Reading the New Testament

4g: Why are Paul and his letters such a big deal?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Many people are used to reading Paul's letters as documents of and inspiration for faith. Have you ever read them specifically as evidence of the Early Church? What assists in such a reading?
2. See what new ideas arise for you when you look out for the lives, interests and passions of those dynamic and very human people mentioned in Paul's letters.
 - What characters do you recognise?
 - What questions arise for you?
 - Which personalities interest you the most?
 - Who annoys you?
 - Who inspires you?
 - Which character is a mystery that you wish you knew more about?
3. Many authors have taken these questions and woven stories about first century lives. What Pauline character could inspire you to do the same!
4. How might Paul communicate the meaning of the resurrection to a modern audience? What words would he use? What media do you think a modern Paul would favour? Have a go at taking on the role of one who communicates the new life of Jesus to a modern world and see what you come up with!

TRANSCRIPT

The Rev'd Dr Marian Free
Lecturer in New Testament

Well in my view, without Paul we'd have a very different Christianity. I think we'd have a much more legalistic Christianity and that's certainly obvious if you read Matthew without any help. Paul's important because Paul is our closest link with the early church whereas the Gospels were written 30 - 40 - 50 years after Jesus' death, Paul's writings are around the late 50s early 60s. So, they are the best evidence we have of the early church. As such they are significant historically.

From my point of view they are extraordinarily significant theologically because if you read the letters of Paul I think he might quote Jesus two times, maybe three... so the story of Jesus is not actually retold. What Paul does is he takes the life of Jesus, well the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and theologises it. So it's not focussing on a resurrection miracle that happened in the past, it is how the resurrection impacts on us day after day after day. It's not about Jesus suffering on the cross but how we interpret the difficulties in our lives in light of Jesus' life and in light of the resurrection.

You know, for us the gospels are so important, we think the life of Jesus is it. It amazes me how Paul had the wisdom (although he probably had help) to interpret what Jesus' life death and resurrection could mean. I think despite the fact that he was writing letters to real people, usually who didn't understand, he's managed to be so articulate and transformative - yep we need Paul!