

Heb 11v4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

I have quoted the last part of the above verse several times lately, mainly when talking of or praying about the death of Billy Graham. I have used the Authorised Version, "he being dead yet speaketh." Partly because that's how I first heard it. I can't remember who preached it. It may have been David Wright, though I'm not sure. In a strange way the fact that I can't remember who preached it, is a good thing. The message is more important than the messenger. And that's true of Billy Graham as well.

I also used the AV because it uses the pronoun "he". And consequently it's easier to apply it to someone else other than the original person it was referring to. Incidentally I would, and have, used this verse to relate to a woman (Emerald Powell). "She being dead yet speaketh." I don't think it is wrong to do that. The Bible was partly written to give us examples, and warnings and encouragement. We can learn these three things from groups of people (Israelites and Canaanites), of either sex (Joseph of Arimathea and Lydia), from animals (Ants and Donkeys), and even objects (Ark of the Covenant and Clay in the Potter's Hand). God has "spoken to me" through a dodgy battery connection, an empty fuel tank, and even an old sock!

But perhaps the main reason I used the AV was because I couldn't remember who the verse was originally about! I had to look it up. Now there's a confession for a pastor. Thankfully it was relatively easy to find. And also, maybe there is a lesson in there somewhere too. As Billy Graham always emphasised, "The Bible says." We should make sure we know, understand, believe and live by what the Bible says. And thankfully, it is so freely and easily available to us. So what did I learn when I looked it up? Abel was commended for his faith. He believed in things that were unseen. As a result of that his worship of God was a priority in his life. For all his good, religious works it was his faith that made him righteous. And it is his faith that lives on, and still speaks, long after his body, and his offering, lies silent in the grave. The message is more important than the messenger.

I was recently told that several people have said that I, and the church, are becoming liberal. It upset me to hear that. The first thing I think of when I hear the word liberal applied to Christians is people who do not take the authority of the Bible seriously. I hope and pray that will never be the case for us at Sholing. Together may we always look up what the Bible says; seek to understand it; believe it; and, by God's grace, live by it. And, perhaps a true sign of that will be when people forget us and just see and remember our God.

Pastor Chris Ricketts.