Collective Worship

The requirement for schools in England to offer an act of Christian worship every day is sometimes controversial. I would like to reassure you of the value of Collective Worship for our school community. I really enjoy every fortnight with the children when I come in for this. It’s a time at the end of the day to relax and we discover lots of things about each other. For example last week we looked at the Old Testament story of God calling the boy Samuel. Samuel heard God’s voice in the middle of the night when he was very young. It was the beginning of Samuel’s vocation to be a prophet in Israel, a challenging but important calling from God. I asked the teachers and staff when they first knew that they wanted to work in a school. We were all excited to learn that one teacher had that sense of vocation going back to when she was just five years old! A few weeks before that we looked at the story of Pentecost in the New Testament when the believers were miraculously enabled to pray and praise God in different languages. We found out about the rich variety of languages spoken by some of our children and staff in the school including French, Urdu, Spanish, and many more.

The stories that we grow up with shape us and give us a vocabulary of ideas and metaphors. Whatever your faith, hearing the stories of the Bible give us a language that will enrich us throughout our lives. I remember listening to a conversation between my teenage daughters about their GCSE exams one tea time. Unprompted by me, they were enthusiastically comparing notes on how they had picked up extra marks in their English exams by recognising parallels and analogies in their set texts with stories they already knew from the Bible. Western literature has been hugely influenced through scripture through the years, and Biblical themes come up frequently. When I studied “Lord of the Flies” at GCSE I remember messianic analogies between the character of Piggy and Jesus in the gospels. Classics such as Crime and Punishment, Les Misérables and Anna Karena are written around biblical notions of sin and redemption.

Beyond the educational value of the stories, we have a lot of fun during Collective Worship. Singing together is good for the soul. The staff, children and I all come out of worship smiling after a heartily singing a song such as “My Lighthouse” together. Maybe you’ve heard your children singing it to themselves at home? And collective prayer is an opportunity to rest our worries, but also to contemplate the needs of a world that is bigger than what immediately confronts us.

We aim to be as inclusive as possible at St Margaret’s . I will offer prayers for our “places of worship” rather than just for our churches so that children of all faith traditions can feel included. And we try to relate our themes to everyday life so that everyone has something to take away. We do not and cannot proselytise in school. All prayer, and music is offered voluntarily and there is no compulsion to agree or to join in. For children who will choose to follow a Christian faith for themselves later (or sooner), collective worship gives them a language and prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer. For children who do not choose to follow a faith collective worship also gives them a language through which they will have a greater understanding of friends, neighbours and maybe even future partners who have a faith. Overall we want every child to feel valued, loved and empowered. Whether or not it is interpreted ion a spiritual way, we want all our St Margaret’s community to be able to confidently say:

*“I can do ALL THINGS through the one who strengthens me”*

Philippians 4:13

Revd Dom Wright