

sword & spear (1Sam.21:7-9)!

- The Bible speaks often of the need for us to mature in our faith. It assumes, unlike many in our culture, that maturity is a good goal rather than remaining adolescent. I think we need to ask ourselves afresh what it means to be mature in every sense, for if we want our young people to grow to maturity they need examples and role models to follow. I believe that doesn't mean we lose the ability to have fun or the capacity for wholehearted worship, but I wonder if we have a clear idea now what it does mean?
- If young people need role models from us then we need young people to give us the fresh insights and renewed energy that is theirs in abundance! [LICC experience in Top Shop]. We must take Young People and their culture seriously if we are to help them with tools to critique what's being thrown at them and discern what's good and what's bad. Young people often approach things differently and whether we go along with it or not, the challenge received before God is healthy and life-giving for them and for us all.
- So, when was the last time you talked with a parent or walked into Top-Shop or picked up a children's magazine? Do you know all the activities for Young People that take place through or in Holy Trinity and St Saviour's? You might be surprised at what already happens and how many people are involved. Nevertheless, once you know, don't be afraid to run ABCD by them and ask yourself what your part might be in the future.
- This value is not simply about 'Sunday School'. Apply your imagination under God and you soon find you're thinking within the church (eg Ju:C, TROG), through the church (eg Lighthouse, Parents & Toddlers, Breakfast Club), in the local community (eg Parenting), in the local schools (eg SCAt), in political areas (eg CARE for the Family), into mission (eg Turning Point)...
- The question becomes 'Given all that is possible what is God calling us to do at this time and from this place?'. As you read the other Values you'll see how Encouraging and Supporting Young People impacts our worship, our biblical learning, our spiritual growth, making a place for them, our prayer, our evangelism, our passion for Justice and loving our community. The journey is just beginning and, as we were reminded again only recently from Zechariah 4:6, the Lord Almighty tells us that the only way we'll do his will is *not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit*.

Nick Grew

Morning Services @ HT – 11th September 2005

- Value 9: *Encouraging and Supporting Young People* – **NOT** about ignoring other ages, but it **IS** a recognition that youth is a battleground in our culture. Prov.22:6 says, *Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it*. That universal truth is known just as well by commercial interests as by churches. Capture the child you have the adult for life. Advertisers entice the youngest through glossy ads. Banks woo teenagers and students to gain from selling them credit through the rest of their lives. The paradox of rebellion and the pressure to conform has never been greater.
- Of course exploitation is not new – betraying my age, I hear it every time I listen to the words of *Quadrophenia* (film & album) which are based upon youth in the 1960s, and sticking with The Who, here are some lines from *The Seeker* that summarise for me, much of the turmoil of teenage.
*I'm happy when life's good, and when its bad I cry
I got values but I don't know how or why*.
- But the cultural and commercial pressures that reach into our lives via the media, so often bypassing the filters of faith, family and church – these have enormous potential and while some are good, others are definitely harmful. This is a tough time to be a Christian Parent (or any parent – just look at the TV help programmes) and its both exciting and challenging to be a child growing up at this time. When was the last time you talked with a parent or walked into Top-Shop or picked up a children's magazine?
- 18 months ago we decided to employ a Youth & Children's Worker. We might not have said it in so many words, but *Encouraging and Supporting Young People* was the value that motivated us. We're not alone in our concern. Our local Residents Association is looking at youth facilities, KHCS is looking at possibilities, Regen project in Woking, Nick Orborski (Methodist) has youthwork credentials. Perhaps God is stirring something up!?
- But employing a Y&CW is nowhere near being the whole solution. As with all our values, there has to be an ongoing challenge to our attitudes, activities and actions at every level; collective and personal, church and home, church and community... All I begin to say now, and that's all I can do in one sermon, is to set the ball rolling, introduce some key issues, set some important questions, and challenge us all to be prepared to go with the consequences, and all this under the guidance of Word and Spirit. So let's put down some foundations.

- (Matt.19:13-15) Jesus told us to take children seriously! This is basic but essential teaching. When the disciples tried to keep children away from Jesus he made it clear that they were welcome, indeed that their faith was an example to follow. I'll take 2 points from this. Firstly, we see a theological point – Jesus seeks to have a direct, unmediated relationship with children. In other words it is possible for a child to know Jesus and have a valid relationship with Him.
- Let us take good note of that fact but not fall into the trap of regarding a child as being a young adult. Their faith is precious and delicate, and their insights may be breathtaking, their prayers, stunningly direct. We can be inspired by children but their contributions are to be neither ignored nor over-lauded. They remain children and we must not go the other extreme and make the worldly mistake of putting them on a pedestal.
- Secondly, Jesus sets us a practical example – if Jesus makes space for children in a place of honour then so must we, his church. On another occasion Jesus took this further and said that harming, or leading astray, or not protecting those who are young in faith, children and adults, is a serious crime with eternal consequences (Matt.18:1-6). Do we regard what I am doing now as of greater importance than what is going on at Ju:C this morning? We should not! Appropriate teaching may make for different styles but it cannot change the importance of the scriptural truth that is being shared.
- This takes us into the area of responsibilities and here I believe we often run counter to current cultural trends. [Tell story of mother & daughter – 'what would your teacher say?']. Our culture is expecting agencies outside the home to play a greater & greater part in caring for and educating our children. Politically and personally we need to challenge that (CARE), and we also must engage with it creatively (eg Breakfast Club). The Bible places strong emphasis upon the home and parents as the context in which a child is best shaped for life. Eph.6:1-4 is an example of direct teaching to children and parents showing the responsibility and accountability of both.
- There are other passages that refer indirectly to Biblical understanding of parent-child relations. For example, in Matt.7:9-11 Jesus assumes that parents know how to give good gifts to their children. It's very difficult in our commercialised world but good parenting means we won't always say 'yes' to every request and we will need to teach patience and the meaning of the word 'no'. Heb.12:7-11 assumes that discipline will be part of a child's upbringing and that this will become a positive experience showing love rather than denying it.
- These kinds of practice are not only good for the character of a child, they are also valuable in helping them to understand God and gain sound theology. If someone has never known a choice between right and wrong, the consequences of doing wrong, the place of repentance and the value of forgiveness, how can they ever begin to understand the Cross of Jesus Christ, or appreciate confession in church? [Parenting Courses - not just for church but for community].
- [Story of couple with daughter ref sex with boyfriend – no framework to say 'no'] That takes us on to the area of teenage which is more complicated in every way. All those hormones and growth spurts!! Commerce longs that all children will become adolescents as quickly as possible and that everyone else should stay adolescent for as long as possible. Their energy and turmoil and freedoms make teenagers wonderfully vulnerable to exploitation, the more so if they have access to money!
- Teenagers are toddlers with big bodies – when they fall over or get things wrong the consequences are that much bigger! But just as with toddlers there's a healthy balance of encouraging them to explore, allowing them to make mistakes, and loving them when they've made a mess. At every age, but especially in our youth, we learn by a mixture of discovery and teaching. Nurturing gifts requires us taking risks and giving appropriate responsibility. When Jeremiah first heard God's call he was a teenager. When he protested his youth God said, "don't say I am only a child" [Jer.1:4-8]. God knew what he was capable of and he starts to train him.
- When Paul wrote to Timothy he told him, *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love and in purity* [1Tim.4:12]. But to guard Timothy from arrogance he tells him also, *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father* [1Tim.5:1]. The challenge goes both ways – to the church that we respect, value and encourage the gifts & contributions of our youth, and to our youth to seek to be worthy in life and word of that respect.
- In that last respect, what kind of role models are we giving to our young people as individuals and in the way we shape the church? Are we open to the possibilities that the way we do things may not be the only way? When David came to fight Goliath Saul fixed him up with a suit of armour. Like new wine in an old wineskin, David simply couldn't cope with that and so took what he knew, Faith in God plus stones and a sling, to fight the battle (1Sam.17:32-40). He rejected accepted wisdom then, mind you he later grew up to be a soldier who fought with armour,