



This is a series of studies for group discussion. The three ministers involved in its production had discovered how the latest New Testament studies and post-liberal theology, coming mostly from the USA, although controversial, were enlightening their understanding of the Gospel stories and had at the same time become aware of how little of this understanding was being passed on to congregations in the UK or offered to them for discussion.

Revd Ted Bishop is a retired Methodist minister with more than 50 years in the ministry, beginning with eight years in Burma and including nine years as Methodist minister in Rome as well as in two circuits in the UK: twelve years in Stevenage and nine years in Ashford, Kent. He is now retired and lives in Canterbury.

Revd John Churcher is a Methodist minister who came into the ministry after a varied career in education. He is now a minister without pastoral charge, available to preach and to conduct conferences and seminars. In 2009 he published his first theological book, *Settings Jesus Free*.

Revd Betty Saunders came late into the Methodist ministry as a senior Candidate after careers in teaching and social work and is now retired.

Betty Saunders, having introduced the participants now writes about this booklet in the preface ...

There are two factors that led to the production of this series of booklets:

- one was that the three of us were discovering how the latest New Testament studies and post-liberal theology coming mostly from the USA was enlightening our understanding of the Christian Gospel and (for the two of us who were regularly preaching) illuminating our preaching;
- the other was the discovery of Betty, the editor, following a letter by her in the Methodist Recorder in October 2008, that there is a real although hidden hunger among the Methodist people, and probably among people in other denominations, for access to this more radical theological teaching

Through friendship with the two preachers she was aware of the serious study that went into each sermon which made the sermons worthy of wider circulation and, through the response to her letter in the Methodist Recorder, she was also aware of a serious lack of inexpensive group discussion material that takes into account post-liberal New Testament scholarship and theology.

The origin of these studies in sermon form had the advantage that they were composed, not for students in an academic setting who might be prepared to read large theological books, but for presentation to the random mixture of people in ordinary congregations. The theology in the sermons might be unfamiliar but was well digested by the preacher before presentation and always involved a suggested application to everyday life. The questions are intended to draw out ideas and information that may be new to the group and there are longer notes on some key issues that arise. Although preachers habitually follow the Lectionary they also frequently refer to parallel versions of the same story or theme in other Gospels or Old Testament readings. The sermons chosen

follow the themes of the Christian year rather than the Lectionary readings for any one year but the parallels that make them relevant for other years are noted and easy to find.

We have all three been engaged in a journey of faith and have found that, when we are not afraid to question previous assumptions and formulations composed by the Church for earlier generations, the result is not a negative loss of faith but an honest discovery of new depth of meaning and relevant for our day.

As the 3 participants are undertaking this on a *not for profit* basis we too are selling the book for £4.99 (actually £5 it's easier!) and so with a padded envelope and 2nd class postage I can send one for £6. If more are needed, say for group study, I will have to work out a fresh price on request.

Please make cheques out to E.A.BISHOP and send the request to Ted Bishop, 8 St. Michael's Place, Canterbury, CT2 7HQ.

A 2nd volume, *Covenant – Easter issue* is now in preparation. A real *known* need is being met by this, but one that does not meet universal approval