

Bible Sunday

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Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy scriptures
to be written for our learning:
help us so to hear them,
to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ

My text today is part of the last verse (v16) from today's reading from Psalm 119:
'I will not forget your word'.

It's good to be back at St Barnabas and it is kind of Father Richard to invite me to preach to you this morning. Next Sunday, in St Bartholomew's Dinard, we will be celebrating All Saints so we will be remembering you in our intercessions. Thereafter the Sundays in November, the Kingdom season, culminate in the feast of Christ the King, then it's Advent Sunday and the four week run up to Christmas. And another year will be over. But first today, the Last Day of Trinity, the Lectionary allows us the opportunity to celebrate Bible Sunday and so to my text today: **'I will not forget your word'**.

If I said the word Bible to you, what would spring to mind ? 'Holy', as in the Holy Bible ? 'Good', as in the Good Book ? 'Scripture' as in the Holy Scriptures, that which is written down for our learning ? 'The Word of God', in the sense that the Bible is a record of God speaking to us ? All are possible answers and there are a lot more but this morning I'd like to focus on just one thought - that the Holy Bible, the Good Book, is a written record of God speaking to us, literally our Bible is the Word of God.

What distinguishes us from other animals is language. Now I know that if you are an animal lover you will say to me, for example, that your dog can communicate with you. Your pet knows when it's time for food, to go for a walk and to go to bed. If they want something from you, they know how to ask. But the difference between people and animals is our language is so sophisticated that we can express our thoughts and feelings, our sense of right and wrong, in ways an animal just cannot comprehend because animals, no matter how intelligent, lack the language to give shape to such thoughts and ideas. No dog, however bright, would be able to sit attentively through this sermon listening to me. Mind you I'm not sure that all of you are !

As Christians, we believe in a loving God, a God that loves us so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be born into the world to save us. We believe in the Holy Spirit who is with us even as I speak, encouraging and inspiring us, comforting and informing us. We believe in a God who speaks to us directly and one of the clear ways he can speak to us is through the Bible, a written record of God speaking to us over thousands of years.

If what I say is true, then what should be our attitude to the book which is a major way God speaks to us ? I think the word I would use is 'respect'. We should respect the Bible for what it is, a useful book in shaping our lives as Christians and our relationship with God. We are fortunate to live in a time when Bibles are readily available in a variety of translations and at a price we can afford. But the very fact it is easy to own a Bible may mean we don't value what is commonplace – a Bible in our homes.

And if we do respect the Bible, then we should use the Bible because above all the Bible is a useful book. It contains the history of our faith, a record of God's dealings with us his people. It is a guide to good behaviour, how to live a decent life. It can inspire and challenge us to be the sort of people God intends us to be.

I started this short sermon with a text from Psalm 119: 'I will not forget your word'. Let me end with the same thought. If we are serious about our faith, then as good Anglicans we should remember to respect the Bible as the Word of God and remember to use our Bible to shape our lives. As Christians, may the words of psalmist be our own : 'I will not forget your word'.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
St Barnabas, Old Heath
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H: Sermon 24: Bible Sunday

