

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.

Our text today may be found in Psalm 119 verse 130:

'When your word goes forth it gives light:

It gives understanding to the simple.'

Today is Trinity 22, the Last Sunday after Trinity and it is also Bible Sunday, a feast that can be moved to another date should Father Richard be so minded. Father Richard is, as you all well know, generous by nature so when I asked if I could preach on Bible Sunday, with a smile I could hear over the internet, he said why not – a good idea. So today, let us briefly consider the one book all of us have in common in our homes and that some of us might have on our Kindles – the Holy Bible.

I'd like to ask you three questions about the Bible:

- What do you think the Bible is ?
- What do you think of the Bible ?
- What use is the Bible to you ?

So what do you think the Bible is ? The word itself is from the Greek, biblos – a book – and there you have it. The Bible is a book but actually it's more than just one book, it's really a collection of books, a portable, mini-library if you like. There are 27 books in the New Testament and there are 39 in the Old Testament making a grand total of 66 in our standard Bibles – and that's not to mention any of a number of apocryphal books that failed to be included – for example the Gospel of Bartholomew ! These writings are different by different authors or editors but the one thing all of them share is that the Church considers them to be inspired by God, that they are the word of God. There are many different types of writings: stories and myths; history and biography; poetry and prophecy; teaching about morality and teaching about the nature of God. The original language of the New Testament is Greek; the original language of the Old Testament is Hebrew. It was translated into Latin and the fruit of the Reformation is the many translations into English. The King James Bible or the Authorised Version, which celebrated its Quatercentenary just two years ago, is the Church of England's great gift to English-speaking Christians.

So what do you think of the Bible ? Now obviously I can't say what exactly your thoughts may be – I can only guess and if I do try to guess, then I'm bound to get it wrong for at least some of you. But it's important that you have your own view,

that if someone were ever to ask to you or if you wanted to share what you believe with someone else, you have some idea of what you might say before you say it. So instead, let me tell you what the Bible means to me and then if it reflects what you think, great, but if not tell me or Father Richard and you will have an interested and sympathetic ear.

So what do I think ? I think in the Bible that we have a something extremely precious, a pearl beyond price. The Bible is a repository of wisdom which has been communicated to us down the ages. I can't think of a time when what was written in the Bible did not form part of the background in which I was brought up. Our family values were shaped by Christian principles - if my mother ever gave me a slap, which was not that often, it was out of love, in order to teach me how to behave - 'spare the rod and spoil the child' was not, then, considered child abuse ! The Bible was read to us in school; we heard the stories in assembly and in class; Christmas and Easter, Ascension Day and Whit Sunday which we now call Pentecost; Harvest Festival and Remembrance Sunday were all part of the rhythm of a normal year for me. When I went to church, the Bible was a central part of the service. A great deal of time and effort and scholarship has gone into making it available to me in a form and language that I personally can understand. It is a book that has shaped and informed my life personally and publically. The debt I owe those who have gone before me can only be repaid in part by how I live my life now and by passing on the faith that is central to me and to others.

So is the Bible of any earthly use to you ? Again, let me run past you what I think and you check it out against your own thoughts or reflections. Useful, of use,

simply means that in our day-to-day lives, the Bible has real relevance. And of course my answer is YES. The Ten Commandments are just as relevant to us today as they were when Moses gave them to the Children of Israel. Okay, some folk work on a Sunday; okay, some people swear using the name of God as a swear word; okay, any one of us could lie or envy; cheat on our wives or our husbands; steal, disrespect our parents and some, like certain terrorists, may even be guilty murder. Fact is the Bible offers us an ethical gold standard in setting out values to inform our behaviour, a code of morality that puts love of our neighbour on a par with love of self, all because we are responding to God's love for us. And God loves us so much that he wants us to come home to him and the Bible tells us the way to do so by believing in his Son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Saviour.

So there you have it. And let me leave you with this thought which is our text today: the Bible is like a lamp to our feet as we journey through the dark places of this life and it is a guidebook and instruction manual with the voice of God speaking to us individually, directly a possibility that can render even the simple among us wise ! Now is that not good or what ?

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

*Preached at the Parish Eucharist
St Barnabas, Old Heath
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G: Sermons 28 : Bible Sunday

