

## 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 may be found in today's reading from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, chapter 3 and verse 15:

**' . . . how from childhood you have known the sacred writings . . . '**

Where did you first hear the Bible read aloud to you ? Can you remember how old you were and where you were when you did ? I guess for me it was in primary school in East London – Monega Road Infants and Junior Mixed, some time in the mid-nineteen-fifties. We used to sit, cross-legged, on the wooden floor of the school-hall where during assembly the Headmistress, whose name I've forgotten, would daily read a portion of scripture to us and the first one I can remember which personally made a deep impression on me was the story of pearl beyond

price – you know the parable – in which a merchant sells all he has in order to buy the most perfect pearl imaginable.

Well, today, the Last Sunday in Trinity, is also Bible Sunday so I'd like us to consider briefly why the Bible is a book we should still treasure. Why? Simply because the Bible, holy scripture, is the word of God, inspired by God, useful in helping us be the people God wants us to be.

That said, I want to say we should value the Bible because the Bible is our book – it is, as the author A N Wilson rightly says, 'The Book of the People'. Back in the summer, he published an excellent short study of the Bible and he makes the point that the Bible is our book, the people's book. Why? Because the stories and teaching therein are at the heart of our faith, the key to our faith, the ground of our faith. Before anyone could read, they could see Bible stories in the stained glass of the churches and in the imagery – for example, in a carved wooden rood screen with Christ crucified on the cross, his mother, the Virgin Mary, on one side, the beloved disciple, John, on the other, looking up at him. The churches themselves enshrined Christian teaching in their architecture built as they were on an east-west axis in the shape of a cross with a nave like an upturned boat, a symbol of our salvation, and a steeple pointing up to heaven, bells to remind folk of sacred time.

But it is the Reformation that brought the Bible to ordinary folk and made the Bible their book, our book, the book of the people. Instead of a version in Latin, accessible to scholars, the words were now in English which ordinary folk could

hear for themselves in services in English. And being able to read the word of God for oneself was also a great motivation to learn to read. It was in the spirit of the Reform, to give 30 young boys on the edge of London the chance to learn to read and write and do sums, that made Dame Alice Owen found the school named after her in 1613, a school I taught in for over twenty years.

So why is the Bible the book of the people ? Because the Bible is so much a part of our culture, our common knowledge, a shared way of making sense of the world. The Bible is part of our psyche, our imagination and it shapes the way we make sense of the world, of life, of what is going on around us.

And above all the Bible is true. It tells us the truth about the world and universe in which we live. That God is our creator, that God loves us so much that he sent his only son into the world to save us, that the Holy Spirit is alongside us here and now to inspire, comfort and guide us. That is not to say that everything written in the Bible is literally true. There is more than simply factual truth, historical truth scientific truth. There is the truth of poetry – for example, the picture we have in our minds of the sun at dawn rising in the east moving across the sky during the day to set in the west at nightfall. There is the truth of story – mythos – of the Garden of Eden, of Adam and Eve, which tells us that we are free to choose and if free then we can choose badly.

So on Bible Sunday let me simply say that we should value the Bible because not only is the Bible the inspired word of God but as the book of the people it is our book and as such a true path to the true God.

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

*Preached at the Parish Eucharist*

*St Barnabas Old Heath*

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G: Sermons 32 : Bible Sunday

