

Sermon – Bible Sunday – 7/10/2018 – Rev. Nathan Thorpe

‘May our hearts, the word receiving be the good ground where it grows’.

Lord, as you open your word to our hearts, open our hearts to your word. Amen.

The Bible is one of the world’s most widely distributed books. The Bible was originally written in three different languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. People, like William Tyndale, died today, 6th October, 1536, so that the Bible could be translated into more different languages than any other book.

There are more old, handwritten copies of the Bible manuscripts still in existence than any other ancient document. The longest book in the Old Testament is Psalms. The shortest book in the Old Testament is Obadiah. The longest book in the New Testament is Acts. The shortest book in the New Testament is 3 John with the fewest number of words. (2 John has more words, but fewer verses.).

Who can hazard a guess a guess at what today’s theme is in our service today? I’ll give you a clue – check your bulletins.

But what can I tell you about the Bible that you don’t already know? Collectively, not much. But, I’ll take a leaf out of Jesus’ book – let me tell you a story

I was once invited to say some prayers at my cousin’s baptism. His church didn’t do ‘godparent’s’ but he asked me to be his baptism ‘sponsor’ – to pray and support him through baptism.

He was baptised in the sea near to where he lived.

Tom, he’s now at University studying music, loved music, sailing and swimming. They are going to be my 3 points for this Bible Sunday.

Because Tom loved all these things, I based my prayers around these – and added in the hope of baptism, that he would grow up to know God’s love for him, and to follow the example of Jesus in his life.

So first, music: What has that got to do with the Bible?

Well, quite a lot actually – because it is full of music – songs, hymns, chants, laments... and just like the development of the earliest music from dots on a page, to the symphonies of Mozart – we can see in the Bible a people thinking about the world around them. Even more than that, they are exploring the deeper, subtler, elements of their life – and trying to understand something, someone, that we call God – and how they relate to each other. It is something, like music, that expands in comprehension the further we go through. And sometimes, it just gets stuck in our ears – like an ear-worm.

If I asked you to pick one Bible story you know, as the soundtrack to your life, what would it be?

I could tell you mine: Matthew 19: 16-30. The parable of the rich young man; who came to Jesus and asked what to do to inherit eternal life. He had kept all the commandments he said. Jesus looked at him with love and told him to give up everything and follow him. The man went away sad, because he couldn’t take that step. I was given that story for reflection by a monk I’d never met at Taize when I was deciding whether to put myself forward for ministry. I haven’t looked back since.

But for some of us, it won’t be a blinding insight. A small still voice, perhaps? A resonance? What’s your Bible ear-worm?

Which takes me on to my second point of sailing. Tom loves to sail. But to sail we need a wind – we need, in other words, the ‘ruach’ (in Genesis – the breath that gives life- the Holy Spirit). We can’t always see the wind, but we can feel it, and see its effects. We can also harness it to help us move – and in this book, God can inspire us with the fruit of an encounter with a biblical text. When Paul says to Timothy ‘all scripture is inspired by God’ this is what he means. The Bible is another vehicle or channel for God to speak to us and tell us about his love. It’s relevant, because it tells us of the same world, and the same troubles. We can draw from its riches, and the example of Jesus – who summed up the library of books – in his very person. What can we learn from Jesus’ dialogue – so that our lives may be informed also?

Now, swimming was another thing that my cousin loved – and it was here my prayers reached their conclusion. I prayed that his baptism would give him the confidence to dive into the pool of life. I encouraged him to do that because our deeds come from what we believe. And how do we know what we believe, if we do not learn, read & think? Sometimes (I know it might be a shock) but sometimes we do not always have it right on our own. The Bible is a great talking partner for these questions – because it reflects the complexities of human life really well. Our individual engagement with it, however much or little, informs our own faith – and strengthens our church as we seek, like Paul says to Timothy today, to ‘train for righteousness’. As part of this training we have several opportunities in St Peter’s. There are our Bible study groups – led by Michael, Peter, Alison and Ken. There is our Christian Basics course – on your bulletin. Marilyn Siddon-Smith arranges for leaflets of bible study notes. You can get daily texts of verses to your phone, buy a bible that splits it over the course of a year, in comic books, or that removes the numbers in it and just tells the Bible narrative. Here I have a few; a Greek version in the individual language, a Latin one (as read in the Middle Ages, my grandfather’s Bible, my youth Bible (gift from parents at Christmas 2004) and the one from my ordination where I promised to preach whether ‘in season or out of season’.

I invited Tom to dive into the pool of life – his new life as Christian- which includes the Scriptures.

I invite you to dive into the pool of scripture. Or at least to dip one little toe.

One little act though that I would ask you to do.

Take a Bible verse from the basket on your way out – it may be familiar, or it may not be so. Try finding the chapter it is in and dip in one little toe in to the pool. Take it, and see what it teaches you about Jesus, and then ask how it might impact the world around you.

As you do, my prayer for you all this week echoes our gospel reading - that your searching may inspire you to complete the life work he has given you, and encourage you in the very works that you are doing – so through them you may testify to God, who has brought you here, to be fed, and sent out again.

Amen.