

## Bible Sunday 2013 – Sun Oct 27th

Readings: Isaiah. 45:22-25      Rom 15:1-6      Luke 4:16-24

Theme:      The message of the Bible and its role in our Christian lives

---

So, today is Bible Sunday.

If you've picked up a copy of the October church magazine, you'll have seen an article by Jeremy (on 'The Vicar's Page') all about Bible Sunday. He gives a brief history of its re-scheduling from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent in the BCP to today, the Last Sunday after Trinity.

And so this morning we've heard from Isaiah, Romans and Luke - three passages which make special reference to the Bible.

Many books have been written and many sermons preached about the Bible!

There is so much we could cram into the next few minutes, but what is it that is pertinent to *us, here and now*?

Well, I think a sermon on Bible Sunday should have the aim of raising its profile, and of encouraging us to take another look, or to inspire us to read it more often; because there's no denying that it's a book with immense potential to change our lives.

This morning's sermon will aim to give us something to think about and some practical suggestions of things we could do in response.

So first, some things to think about.

What is the Bible? How should we treat it? And what is its message?

These days, the Bible is freely available to us in the western world – we can get it in the form of an 'old-fashioned' book, or electronically for laptop, iPad, phone or whatever else; and some of these versions are free to download

The Bible is different to the Qu'ran of the Muslims or the Hebrew texts of the Jews. We don't need to learn the original Greek or Hebrew languages in which it was written; the Bible has always been a translation. Originating as it did as a collection of different writings, by the year 380 AD there were so many variants of it around that Jerome translated it all into Latin, the language of educated people in the medieval world. This version remained for over 1000 years, until the Reformation in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when it began to be translated into the newly developing European languages.

Many people gave their lives, literally, in order to see the Bible freely available for everyone to read. At present, the Bible has been translated into over 2,500 languages.

In England, we celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Version of 1611, two years ago. According to a book about the King James Bible I bought at the time, "we now have as pure and uncorrupted a text as anything that has survived from the ancient world", thanks to the numerous translations that have been made over the centuries.

The facts about its origins have some implications for the way we treat the Bible.

Because it's a collection of writings, and some of the authors are known, and because it's a translation, the Bible isn't something to be 'worshipped'.

We don't need to worship the Bible,  
we worship God the Trinity who inspired it.

To do justice to such a significant book, we can approach it with the minds that God has given us. We can question it, read what other people have written about it, and come to conclusions about it. We can acknowledge that there are contradictions within it; that different authors put things in different ways. It's a historical book, so we can approach it as history; it's a literary monument, and we could approach it like that if we wish. One thing I would say, is that we don't have to approach it as if it were *all literal*. If we do this, I think we begin to make the Bible into something it isn't, and that has consequences for our faith.

So, what is the message of the Bible?

The Bible has been called 'a love letter from God to His people'.

Yes, I think it is. But I would like to suggest that we could expand that to say that it's a document that looks at real life through the eyes of faith in God.

At its heart, the Bible tells us about the relationship between humankind and God; beginning with creation in Genesis and ending with visions of 'a new heaven and a new earth' in Revelation. The Old Testament is about the relationship between God and his chosen people Israel (the Jewish nation); the New Testament tells how the relationship is broadened to include all people everywhere, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our reading from Isaiah today, we heard God say:

"Turn back to me and be saved...for I am God and there is no other...From my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'" God invites his people to worship Him, not false idols.

And in Romans, we heard that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope."

The scriptures have been written to encourage us and to give us hope; to help us to interpret life through the eyes of our faith in God.

And in our Gospel reading from Luke, we heard Jesus reading and preaching on a passage from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

And then he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke's understanding – and that of many others – was that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures; in particular, the promise that a Messiah would come to save all people.

Jesus did it by his actions and by his words, by living, dying and being raised to new life by God so that *all of us* can have a relationship with God. You and I can know that God loves us – that is the Bible's message, and the Bible is there to help us to reflect on real life through our experience of faith.

So, how can we do that?

Let's think about a few practical things we could do in response to what we've just heard.

It is helpful to our developing spiritual life with God to read about the love he has for us and about the way others have responded to Him. It's too easy, I think, to just say 'read the Bible more!' – because we all need help to do this, and there are many ways of approaching it.

Here are three:

First, as Jeremy has written about in this month's magazine, there are many resources published by the Bible Reading Fellowship, that provide help for us by structuring our reading and giving helpful insights or interpretations of the text (see poster).

Secondly, there is the Common Worship Lectionary which is published by the C of E for use in our worship – the readings for each Sunday are printed on the notice sheet so that you could refer to them later, if you wish.

A third way is a way that is written about by Father Jamison, the Abbot from Worth Abbey, that was featured in the TV series 'The Monastery' – the slow, meditative reading of a passage of scripture called 'lectio divina'. He says, "Just as prayer involves a person speaking to God as 'you', so lectio divina involves God speaking to the reader as 'you'...as I let God address me, I feel moved to address God in response." ('Finding Sanctuary' p. 61). This is a slow way of reading the Bible, taking a passage and slowly reading so that the Holy Spirit can communicate with us.

Other practical things we could resolve to do, involve encouraging others to read the Bible. We could read about the work of charities which translate the Bible and distribute it around the world – like the Bible Society or Wycliffe or the Gideons – and give financially to them.

Or we could take part in distributing the scriptures by buying a copy of a gospel, for example, and leaving it somewhere – at the dentists or doctors, on a train, in a works canteen... Or buy copies of the Bible for family members or friends as presents, or (if they already have a Bible) perhaps some reading notes or a commentary to help them interpret it.

Or we could decide to pray for those who might pick up the Bible for the first time; or for those who regularly read the Bible as part of their work (eg University lecturers, clergy...); or for the linguists who are translators helping to bring the Bible alive in new languages.

All these things are possible, and you may be able to think of many more.

As the Bible Society website says:

"It's full of human stories – of love, greed, joy, loss, passion – all the things that will be around as long as people are. It's vital to our culture. It's part of the answer to the world's needs. It's cherished by billions of people around the world. It's more than a book."

So may we be reminded by Isaiah to turn to God and be saved,  
for the invitation comes from him .

Let us be encouraged by Paul's letter to the Romans,  
that the scriptures are there to help our spiritual journey and give us hope.

And may we know through faith the Jesus who is the fulfilment of those scriptures.

Through our faith in him,

let us be resolved to take some practical steps  
to allow God speak to us as we read the Bible,  
and to find ways to help others to read it.

Amen.