

18th September 2016

Trinity 17

Sermon 730b

Holy Trinity, Sunningdale 10.00

Texts: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

May my spoken word be faithful to the written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ.

BIBLE SUNDAY!!!

There are many roads or religions that lead to heaven, but the Bible, the handbook of Christian faith, tells us there is only one faith, and only one way to heaven – and that is through Jesus Christ. There may be many believers, but only one Gospel and, as in our Gospel, it is the one we must preach too, one of love, humility, repentance – and faith. We must preach it in deed, as well as in words.....and to tell our story if necessary.

We are so often judged by how we live our lives, not by the words we speak about our faith –because so often we can be humoured for seemingly ‘holier-than-thou’ words that people either don’t believe, or find hard to understand because they can’t relate them to their own lives. So let’s not leave our faith and our Gospel story at the door of the church as we leave, but take that Gospel out into the world and live out our lives of faith in all we do and say.....and underpinned it as Christians through

prayer, and, in a great part, by what we read in the Bible. Let's also ask ourselves 3 questions:

- Do we think our Gospel based faith is worthy of being preached?
- What is our story – i.e. how has our faith changed us?
- Does our faith, and the way we live our lives, measure up to the standards of the Bible, as preached by Jesus?

So let's look at the Bible – and how God is the basis and inspiration of Scripture: I offer you the following: The Centre of the Bible

- Shortest Chapter in the Bible Psalm 117
- Longest Chapter in the Bible Psalm 119
- Chapter in the centre of the Bible Psalm 118
- There are 594 chapters BEFORE Psalm 118
- There are 594 chapters AFTER Psalm 118
- If you add the two together you get 1188
- Centre verse of the Bible is Psalm 118.8
- In one version that verse is: "It's better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man"
- Hence the central word in the Bible is LORD

□ So God is at the centre of it all!!!!

And not only is God at the centre of it all – but the message is FOR all. Just look at today's reading from 2 Timothy 14.17 – “The Lord stayed with me and gave me strength so I could fully tell the Good News to the Gentiles (those who are not Jews).

” The Bible and its message is for everyone, and for eternity.

However, the world-renowned French philosopher Voltaire didn't believe that, and once said, ‘A hundred years from my death the Bible will be a museum piece.’!Exactly a hundred years after his death the French Bible Society set up its headquarters.....in Voltaire's old home in Paris!!

On Bible Sunday we celebrate the most popular – but often unread – book in the world especially in the West at any rate. It is so often underrated – or even despised by many – and if we are honest, how many of us pick up the Bible and really read it every day, or every week, or even once a year! Yet this is the book on which civilisations have been founded; for which people have given their lives; for which people have risked everything so they could smuggle it into repressive countries, (‘God's Smuggler’ Brother Andrew) It is the book that people in distant countries, this very day, are desperate to own.

Mahatma Gandhi said, 'You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisations to pieces, turn the world upside down, and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it's nothing more than a piece of literature!'

Book Aid is a charitable trust that collects and distributes Bibles worldwide. Could we as a church bring our spare Bibles together and send them to where they will be used so much and until the pages fall apart! And yet how often do ours sit on our shelves, undisturbed, for years, gathering dust?

I remember 'learning' Shakespeare at school- so boring as we had to learn and recite sections by heart, but not ever seeming to truly get 'into' it. It wasn't till I saw 'Romeo and Juliet' as a film, then saw it performed outdoors in the round that it began to get more interesting.

It's about bringing the words off the page (SHOW PICTURE) and something to do with that saying: Hear and forget, see and remember, do and understand.

That's where Bible study comes in: Last week I had a really good example of that – I was involved in an Emmaus Course studying the parable of the Prodigal Son. It wasn't until we began to talk it through, that the words came off the page for a young woman, who was suddenly

able to relate it to her own life, even though she saw herself as a prodigal daughter being reunited with her mother. That enabled others in the group to see that the parables of Jesus relate to us today 2000 years later. She had made it real.

We need to get excited about the words on the pages, like so many thousands of new Christians in the world. The Bible needs to stop simply being the book where the weekly readings come from, and which are immediately forgotten – so it is also down to the readers to read with meaning, not just as a string of words; it needs to cease to be seen as boring old words, but something that brings our faith alive, by becoming relevant to us today – such as through Bible reading notes from the Bible Reading Fellowship - even lots on line now! Thanks to good old Google! We don't need to be learned theologians – or arrogant Pharisees as in the Gospel reading, to inherit the kingdom of God, but humble repentant learners like the Tax collector.

Jesus' utter commitment was to the hallowed words he had known since childhood, or what we know as the Old Testament. He quotes from what he saw as the divine authority of the Old Testament 78 times, the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) alone 26 times. He quoted from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, and

Malachi. He referred to the Old Testament as “The Scriptures,” “the word of God,” and “the wisdom of God.” Even the apostles quoted 209 times from the Old Testament and considered it “the oracles of God.” The Old Testament in hundreds of places predicted the events of the New Testament; and as the New Testament is the fulfillment of, and testifies to the genuineness and authenticity of the Old Testament, both Testaments must be considered together as the Word of God – and so we need to see the Bible in the same way.

Bible Sunday invites us to return to our core document and take it seriously, with the same enthusiasm that Jesus went to his, and that Jews and Muslims today go to theirs.

Yes, it’s complex. It’s a library of 66 books written over hundreds of years. It has many different genres – law, history, poetry, prayers, love songs, visions in the night, letters and apocalyptic, as well as the particular, thrilling form of narrative we call gospel. But complexity invites engagement, not avoidance.

The Bible is God’s book for us, and is our book about God. In essence it’s a glorious love story as God pursues his wayward people to give them back to life in all its fullness.

So how should we read it? One answer is, with head, heart and hands – head to grapple with it, heart to love God through it, hands to obey what God says in it.

The former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks say, 'The Bible isn't a book to be read and put down. It's God's invitation to join the conversation between heaven and earth.'

Another way of approaching the Bible, particularly the narratives and gospels, is to read it at three levels.

The first is the literal or historical level...what was actually happening the time it was written, and why, and for whom?

A second level at which the passage can be read is theological. Here we're being introduced to the counter-intuitive idea of the Messiah as a servant of the poor and oppressed and not as a military leader intent on driving out the nation's enemies. This is the kind of Saviour, the kind of God that we now know we need. The ways of violence are self-repeating and selfdefeating. Ultimately the old ways will only be defeated on a cross.

A third level us the interpretation for what it means for us today. The impact on, and application in, our lives and our behaviour. What we're

concerned with here is the impact of this passage on our inner lives and resulting behaviour. Where our life is fed and changed.

Scripture is not there as an obstacle course The Bible has a force and impact that truly CAN change our lives.

But first we have to open it!!