

Sermon on Sunday 24 October

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: 2 Timothy 3. 14- 4:5 and John 5. 36b-end

Bible Sunday

A Good Book?



Do you love a good book? A 'Whodunnit' or 'Do it yourself' manual, a Love Story or a Sports Biography, The life of the Octopus or The Life of Catherine the Great! Paperback, hardback, e-book, or radio programme or podcast.

So where does the Bible fit into this? After all, an old-fashioned idiom for the Bible is 'The good book'.

The bible tells the story of God's people from the beginnings of the universe and civilisation, from clan to nationhood, exile to liberation, occupation to dispersion, prophetic calls to Saviour, from religious law and judgement to saving grace and forgiveness, from acclamation as King to death on a cross.

The dust jacket might read: 'A rollicking read of exploration, courage, leadership, all kinds of sin, survival and new beginnings suffused with an enduring hope. Includes plays, poetry, family sagas, the politics of royalty and the rejection of the prophets call for social and religious

reform. Something for everyone'. And yet it can be boring. It can be read, or unread, and seem unrelated to life. It can be done with / put on the shelf, even thrown out.

Contrast this to the experience of the people of Beirut, where last year a chemical blast killed more than 200 people and left 7,500 injured. Bibles were destroyed along with homes. The Bible Society distributed almost 9,000 Bibles and subsidised the cost of more. Why? Because regaining the ability to read the Bible for themselves brought hope.

In China, where Christians continue to be persecuted, party officials often insist that they join the 'Three Self Church' that instils communist party values and forbids sharing the Gospel with others. (It's believed that the Party is writing a 'Communism-friendly Bible' that professes loyalty to the party.) The state limits the production of Bibles. Christians are beaten, sacked from jobs, arrested, tortured, sent to labour camps, killed, or simply disappear. Getting to hear someone preach on the Bible, let alone possessing one, needs courage and persistence. Yet for many the risks are outweighed by the gain.

For other people, they have no choice in whether to read the bible or not - it simply doesn't exist in the language they speak and understand. Bible Societies around the world completed translations of Scripture into 66 languages used by 707 million people last year including in the USA, where the Deaf community celebrated the completion of the American Sign Language Bible.

People are waiting desperately for a bible because this book goes beyond fiction or non-fiction. As the letter to Timothy states, all scripture is inspired by God. It can tell us what human sources cannot reveal.

At the heart of the Bible is a God who keeps reaching out to his people. John's Gospel is about God coming to earth in the form of his son. Using the Jewish legal approach of the time, Jesus calls more than one witness to corroborate the evidence for this. The five witnesses are God, John the Baptist, the power of God the Father in miracles and signs performed by Jesus, the Scriptures and Moses (c.f. Exodus 5:46-47). The testimony is that Jesus is the Son of God and can only do whatever the Father does (v19). This includes the work of giving life and judgement. To believe in the words of Jesus is to believe in God: God's word and Jesus's word are one and the same.

This is why we are told in Verse 24; "I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who has sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed over from death to life."

The Bible does more than speak about life- it has the power to communicate the truth about how God has sent his son out of his love for us. It is the place to look to find hope and strength, meaning and value, forgiveness and freedom, a lasting joy and peace and a life that transcends death. It's a book that exudes Faith when read in Faith. It's a book that gives us guidance on how to live and find meaning in our lives. It's the Bible that tells us that we all have a unique shaped role in God's creation.

I wonder, do you own a Bible - or even more than one - and is that Bible one that you find easy to read or not? Maybe consider buying one that you find readable. Look again at the different versions and translations. Again, consider trying a different way of reading the Bible or studying. There are lots of resources such as published 'Daily Bible Notes', short introductory study guides, YouTube explanations of books in the Bible. Join a home group or a Bible Study group listed in the church magazine. Perhaps it is time to have a coffee with someone who can try to answer questions and is happy to share ideas.

Let's take time to think about our own approach to the Bible; our reading and our understanding as well as our reflection upon, and response to, what we've read.

I'd like to end with some words of encouragement from the song 'Your Word' by Emu Music.

Your word is more than just letters on pages;
It's life and it's love and it's freedom for us
Your word is more than just wisdom of ages;
Its treasures are endless, it's always enough
Your word is more than just stories of old;
It's the truth and the way and the story of love
Your word is more than just breath into dust;
It's your Son, as a man, come to dwell here with us

Your word is a lamp unto my feet

For your word is my hope, it's my joy and my song
Your word endures forever

- Your Word: Emu Music (also on Captivated: Live worship from Keswick Convention)
- Information on the Beirut and translation of new Bibles is from The Bible Society.
- Photo by [Jazmin Quaynor](#) on [Unsplash](#)