

# **Sermon on Wednesday 8 December 2021**

## **by Rev. Bill Church**

### **Bible Sunday**

In Common Worship, Bible Sunday wanders about a bit but in the Prayer Book it is firmly fixed on the Second Sunday in Advent by the Collect, which urges us to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the holy Scriptures.

So, it may be a good time to say something about the authority of scripture. And where better to start than the Anglican party line set out in Article 6 of the 39 Articles:

*"Holy scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."*

That says that that the Bible contains everything necessary for salvation. But it does not say that you must believe literally everything in the Bible – it allows for critical and intelligent reading of the Bible.

Nor does it say that you cannot believe in anything outside the Bible. An example would be the saints, most of whom lived after the last books of the New Testament had been written, and who feature in our Advent Thoughts for the Day.

Richard Hooker, the eminent English theologian of the sixteenth century and foundational to Anglican theology, saw the basis of faith in scripture, reason and tradition in that order.

And wisely so, as reason can unlock the understanding of scripture but scripture is the treasure, and reason can sway with the winds of philosophical fashion.

And tradition is variable. Morris dancing, Christmas trees and fish and chips are all more modern than we sometimes think and the same goes for religious traditions, but scripture stands firm.

Of course, to be rightly understood, scripture must be worked on, if only because it was originally written in Hebrew and Greek and these are the canonical texts. So, English speakers must rely on translations.

And to be rightly understood, we need to consider who wrote each book of the library of scriptures we call the Bible; and when; and why; and for whom.

So, an easy case, Paul wrote the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, probably the earliest books of the NT, addressed to, yes, Thessalonian Christians, but we have to work out what questions the Thessalonians were asking.

And we must respect scripture and not abuse it, for instance by picking texts out of context. To make a ridiculous example, if the noted atheist Professor Dawkins reads his Bible (which I doubt), he might proclaim: "There is no God – what's more, that is in the Bible".

And he is right – see Psalm 14 verse 1 – but then read the context and you will see the full verse is: “The fool hath said in his heart - There is no God”, which tells a different story.

So, be careful when you use quotations from scripture to make a case; and if you are hit over the head with a proof text, do look up the context.

You may have heard the phrase “Bible-believing Christians”, which is usually a coded self description by some conservative Evangelicals, but, in fact, ALL Christians are “Bible-believing”. You have to be, because without the Bible you cannot know of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on which our faith rests.

And all Christians should be “Bible-loving”; getting up close and personal, and being diligent to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the scriptures and find the treasures stored therein.