

WEEKLY SERMON

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The Bible: A diverse book still speaking to us today

This coming Sunday is often known as Bible Sunday because of the collect which is set for today:

*Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
help us so to hear them,
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

In light of Bible Sunday I'm asking, what kind of book is the Bible; what are the scriptures and how should we think about them?

In our services and daily life we turn our attention to the Scriptures, reading and preaching from a passage in the gospels during a Eucharistic service for example, but how often do we stop and consider what kind of writings are we reading?

- 1) The scriptures are a unified story that leads to Jesus.

The first thing to note about the Bible is that contained within it is a wonderful amount of diversity. In the Bible you'll find all sort of different types of literature and different genres, the Bible contains a rich diversity of genres written by 40 different human authors, in three different languages, taking over 1,500 years to write and compile. Taken as a whole, the scriptures have a single divine author and the Bible tells a single unified story that climaxes with the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Everything either leads up to Jesus' life or reflects the ramifications of Jesus' life.

But you might ask the question: if the Bible is as diverse as you've just said, then how can we know that it is also unified in telling a single story? The answer to that is found in noticing how the Bible is constantly cross referencing itself. Part of the fun of reading the Bible is looking for and appreciating how the various authors quote one another in the telling of this single unified story.

A good example of this can be found in our Gospel passage for this Sunday: in Matthew 22:34-46, Jesus and the Pharisees are debating who the Messiah is and Jesus in his response quotes from Psalm 110, in effect creating a 'hyperlink' between the two passages.

Now the words of Jesus in Matthew 22 inform our reading of Psalm 110 and vice versa. Great joy in scripture reading can be found in burrowing down into these hyperlinks and watching for how the life of Jesus inhabits and reshapes the storyline of the Hebrew scriptures.

- 2) The scriptures are ancient meditation literature.

For contemporary westerners it is easy to assume that the scriptures are there primarily to give us information: download the content and then move on.

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Instead of this model, it is more helpful to think of the scriptures as meditation literature: to be read again and again, pondered and considered over years; growing with us as we grow old and changing us in the process.

Many of us will have had the experience of seeing new things each year in the Nativity story. Perhaps the story of the birth of Jesus took on fresh meaning the first time you became a parent or grandparent; Maybe your reflection of the shepherds deepened when you moved to a rural part of the country and came face to face with the reality of agriculture. It is as we read again and again, slowly digesting the scriptures over years that they do their work on us.

Or, as Paul puts it in our New Testament reading set for this weekend: “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16) *dwell* and *richly* are not words to be used about downloading content, they better describe the experience of inhabiting and living with something or someone, enjoying a slow meal or a long walk.

This should be our relationships with the scriptures, a friend whom we have known for many years and who continues to surprise and challenge us as the oldest and best friends always do.

3) Introduction to the Bible Project

These two ideas come from [The Bible Project](#) (that’s a good example of a hyperlink by the way). The project is a charity based in America creating explainer videos, podcasts, articles, and other educational resources to help make the bible and the biblical story accessible to everyone around the world.

Over the years I have found the Bible Project to be a very helpful resource for everyone: whether you are coming to the Bible for the first time or have been reading it for decades. I commend it to you.

As we prepare to celebrate Bible Sunday this weekend, may we all come to love and savour the Scriptures that God has given us, as we ‘hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them’.

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