

The Parish of Christchurch



*The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell*

for Sunday 25th October 2020 – Bible Sunday

Dear Friends,

Sunday by Sunday, where do you find something to make you pause, and reflect on something that speaks to your faith? Perhaps it would be one of the Bible readings? Or maybe something said in the sermon? When we were able to sing, there's a strong chance that it might have been in one of the hymns; it's long been said that Anglicans get a lot of their theology from what we sing.

I suspect that the Collect would rarely feature on that list; and yet the Collect – the prayer that appears early on in a Eucharist, later in Evensong, and changes week to week, depending on the season or saint's day – is one of the crucial elements in our liturgical diet. It's short – blink, and we've missed it – but whether for a Sunday or a saint's day, offers us a prayer that focusses our hearts and minds on God with us now.

Consider the Collect for Bible Sunday:

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 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Like so many of our rich heritage of Collects, the Bible Sunday Collect in a very few lines gives a concise summary of the themes for the day; rather like that short paragraph at the beginning of a chapter in certain types of book, which provides a précis of what is to follow. So in today's Collect we connect with some timeless truths about the Bible.

The Collect begins by reminding us that it is God who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written: not for nothing is it called the Word of God. This is not to enter into debates about Biblical infallibility (though it is worth nothing that the claim to infallibility is not to be found anywhere within the pages of Scripture); but it is to say that in Scripture God has given us a revelation of himself. If we are to come to know anyone, it will most likely be through personal, disclosure, which is what God gives us in Scripture, through the story of his dealings with his people; and, above all, in sending Jesus his Son, the most personal, deepest, truest communication of who God is and of the depths of his love for us.

We need that disclosure; because if we didn't have God's account of who he is, or when we choose to disregard it or look elsewhere to find it, then what follows is that before long human beings tell God what He's like; which is the wrong way round. The Scriptures claim to be from God but written by human beings. As soon as you bring human beings into the equation, things are bound to get a bit messy; but that doesn't detract from their authority or from their power to inspire, challenge and perplex.

Next, we discover something of the purpose of the Bible. In fact, the Collect suggests it has two purposes: first, it is "for our learning". None of us knows enough of our faith to think that we ever stop learning; whether it's learning more of Jesus, more of God the Father, more of the Holy Spirit, more of the Kingdom ways of living to which he calls us, there will always be more to learn.

Scripture's other purpose, according to the Collect is to help us "embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life"; in other words, to build up our faith and sustain us in hope – which we need more than ever in these days of the pandemic. Often, this building up of faith and hope comes as the Bible reminds us of God's faithfulness towards his people, whether in His dealings with Israel down the centuries of the Old

Testament, and then with the infant Church. The strongest encouragements to be trusting God now can come from remembering his faithfulness in the past.

The most famous phrase in the Collect for Bible Sunday – “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” – relates to how we may interact with Scripture today? **Read:** it may be obvious, but we don't know a book until we've read it. This particular book needs to be read, preferably in different ways: sometimes like any normal book; sometimes concentrating on a short passage; sometimes just one verse, reflectively (often in the Psalms). But however we do it, it needs to be read.

Mark, learn: pause for a moment; ask ourselves what this verse might mean; has it something to say to our contemporary situation; how might it apply to us? "Learn" suggests that we try to avoid the words of Scripture going in one ear and out the other, without ever landing in our minds, hearts and imaginations. Only then can we **inwardly digest:** as with food, nourishment follows on from digestion; and inwardly digesting Scripture in turn provides spiritual energy and strength.

And then, having read, marked, learned and inwardly digested, we need to remember that that is not an end in itself. Perhaps the most important New Testament verses about Scripture are John 5.39-40, where Jesus says: “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

That's the key. Bible Sunday reminds us that studying the Scriptures isn't just about dogma, theory, or even devotional reading of the most influential book in the world: this about coming to Christ, and finding the life that comes from Christ himself. In other words, the **written** word of God, which we hear week by week, points to Jesus, the **Living** Word of God, who has promised to be with us always. As these weeks of the pandemic continue, may we indeed search the Scripture, look to Christ for that life and remember (as Spurgeon famously said, that “A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't”.

God bless us all,



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The **All Souls Requiem** will take place at 10.00am on Saturday 31st October in the Priory. Please do pass on this information to friends or neighbours, especially those who have lost a loved one during the past year, They, and you, will be most welcome at this special service.

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Arrangements for **Remembrance Sunday** on November 8th are still being worked out. The Service of Remembrance will begin, as usual, at 10.50am. Because of the constraints imposed by social distancing, however, we shall almost certainly have to issue (free) tickets for this service. More details will be available in next week's pastoral letter.

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A reminder to any of you who have intended to contribute to the gifts to David Hewitt, and the outgoing wardens James Morton and Roger Haxby, but haven't quite got round to it yet:

- **Donation by bank transfer,** please use: Account Name - P.C.C. of Christchurch No.2 Account; Sort Code 52-21-34; Account Number 52428001.
- Please use "Wardens" as reference for James Morton & Roger Haxby; and "Parochial Reader" for David Hewitt. Please email Ian Penny on prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org, when you have sent the donation.
- **Donation by cheque:** please make cheques payable to P.C.C of Christchurch No.2. Account and mark for Ian's attention. If posted, to Priory House, Quay Road, BH23 1BU.
- Whether by post or by hand, please put a note **in** the envelope clearly marked with "Warden" or "Parochial Reader". If you are donating to both, please use two separate cheques; the note in the envelope should reflect which cheque is for which presentation. Thank you.
- **Donation by cash:** please put in an envelope for Ian's attention and bring it to the Priory, clearly marked as above.