

## A Reflection from Revd Ali for the Last Sunday after Trinity ~ Bible Sunday

Today is Bible Sunday, a day when we celebrate the multi-faceted gift that is the Bible. So, to start with, here is a little quiz – you just need to fill in the blanks (answers at the end just in case you aren't able to be in church on Sunday).

3,56,6480 L \_\_\_\_\_

783,137 W \_\_\_\_\_

31,101 V \_\_\_\_\_

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66 B \_\_\_\_\_

1500 Y \_\_\_\_\_

Around 40 \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1500 years, by around 40 different authors making the Bible a very unusual book. The books of the Bible range in genre as well as authorship – there are books of history, biography, adventure, love stories, prophecies, songs, poems and letters. In fact, it really is a bit of a library rather than just one book. And there are as many ways of reading the Bible as there are books. You may want to sit in a favourite place, light a candle, read and then reflect. You may want to read it last thing at night as part of a bedtime routine. You might read the Bible as part of your daily prayers or you may just read it when you have been asked to read in aloud in church. But however you choose to read the Bible, the important thing is to read it and read it at least once in its entirety - but not necessarily all in one go!

When I was being considered for ordination, as part of process, I had to meet with a couple of advisors before meeting with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands. One of my advisors asked me about reading the Bible. I'm the first to admit that I am not the greatest Bible scholar so I was honest at that meeting, and said that I sometimes found it hard to relate to parts of the Bible, so would pick and choose the bits that I read. My advisor likened this to reading a really great novel but missing out chapters 3, 7 and 11. I would probably get the gist of the story, but I would miss out on the nuance and the 'back story' that is so crucial to our full understanding of the narrative. That really opened my eyes to the value of reading the Bible in its entirety, difficult bits and all.

Sometimes on the back or inside cover of a novel there is something to whet your appetite and encourage you to read the whole book. So, in a spirit of encouragement I would like to offer you a précis of the Bible in just 50 words.

God made Adam bit Noah arked Abraham split Jacob fooled Bush talked Moses baulked Pharaoh plagued People walked Sea divided Tablets guided Promise landed Saul freaked	David peaked Prophets warned Jesus born God walked Love talked Anger crucified Hope died Love rose Spirit flamed Word spread God remained
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Hopefully that might be something to spark your appetite for reading one of the books that you have yet to get to. In church we follow the revised common lectionary, a 3-year Bible reading programme that means that on Sundays we are able to 'hear' the voice of each writer week by week, rather than

readings being selected by theme. So, in any given year, the writer of one of the first three gospels will be heard from beginning to end and the majority of the rest of the New Testament will be heard too. Thinking about our recent Gospel readings, Matthew has described in detail the entrapments orchestrated by the religious leaders during Jesus' final visit to Jerusalem. That final visit that would end with his death on the cross. Matthew tells us that Jesus had been in a long series of discussions with the Sadducees, lawyers, chief priests, scribes, Herodians and the Pharisees. All the different groups trying to find a way to trap Jesus into committing blasphemy or sedition.

In each of these carefully orchestrated confrontations, Jesus understood their motivation and often answered their questions with a question that stumped his inquisitors. In this exchange, one of the legal experts from among the Pharisees asks Jesus, 'which commandment in law is the greatest?' Jesus' answer sums up all the laws and the prophets when he says that loving God is the most important thing, but the caveat is, that loving God means that we love all of God's people too. The Pharisees are silenced. Those informal interrogations are over. But as we know, it isn't the end of the story. All the factions opposed to Jesus and his ministry of love and reconciliation, retire to the shadows to plot Jesus' downfall.

So what does it mean to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind? To love God is to delight in God, to cherish God and to seek to know God. That love isn't passive, it is a response to the love of God. We love, because God loved us first. So loving God with all our heart, soul and mind is both responsive and active. That active, responsive love means that whatever we do, think, say, feel - everything should be an expression of our love for God. By putting God first in all that we do we grow closer to God. As we grow closer to God we find that this has practical consequences. Jesus tells us that we cannot claim to love God unless we love others too. Loving God and caring for others go hand in hand. Not just the people that we like or those who look like us, but those who are different, those who we might even consider repugnant or even those who might want to harm us. But whoever the 'other' is, they are still God's beloved child and we are to put their best interests on the same level as our own. If, in every encounter with the 'other', we act according to the active and responsive law of love then we can be merciful and gracious. To love our neighbour as ourselves is to make a conscious choice to love, and act upon that choice.

Loving God with our soul means we want to worship God, not just an hour on a Sunday, but worshipping God by cultivating an ongoing prayerful relationship with God. And like all relationships, a relationship with God needs work. Taking time out from our daily lives to spend with God. Listening to God through prayer and by studying the Bible. Responding to what we hear and read, allowing God's word to enlighten us and prepare us to respond in loving action in the world. Lives lived in relationship with God are ones that bear fruit. Fruit that bring pleasure to God. When we cultivate that responsive and active relationship with God then the Holy Spirit can encourage us, empower us, change us and motivate us to be the people that God wants us to be. To live life in all its fullness and to do our part in helping bring about the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

So, it is not surprising that the book that helps us, inspires us, challenges us and changes us has sold over 5 billion copies worldwide ~ for that we give thanks, in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

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