

"Bible Sunday" – 15 November 2020

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5,6, 7-12: 2Tim3:14 - 4:5;

Aim: The Bible points the way to Jesus.

Today we are going to think about what the Bible means to us. What part does it have in our lives? How do we as a Christian Community gather around God's Word?

At the moment we are living in very uncertain times, with unprecedented levels of disruption. The Covid-19 has brought home that we are not in control of our universe, and also that for us to move in the right direction we need each other perhaps more than we have ever realized.

How can we today experience a spiritual renewal together that enables the Word of God to be living and active in our own life and in the world?

In our OT reading we have Ezra & Nehemiah recording the history of the third return of the Israelites to Jerusalem after they had been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. The exile had been tough, but trying to get back to a new normal existence was even harder. Nehemiah was a great leader and he managed to mobilize those who lived in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city & people began to feel secure again. We should feel encouraged – with God on our side the chaotic situations that we are in can be resolved!

Ezra worked with Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a visionary leader and Ezra was a scribe who taught and applied what the Law of Moses meant to the people. In the reading from today Ezra takes the lead as God's people gathered together around God's word.

So how do we approach the bible? First of all do we wish to read it? Because that is so important. We all need to drink from the truth of God's word. We read that Ezra read from the Book of Moses. The meeting was not in the Temple where only Jewish men could gather, but out in a public square, where all could come and listen. The Word of God is a means of giving water to thirsty souls. We can gather as families, as a church community, and at the moment on zoom. It is a source of wisdom, comfort and hope for all of us throughout the world. I ask the question: "How can we centre ourselves on this Word and invite others to join us at the watering hole?"

Ezra stood up and read about the way in which God had rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was their story he was reading - the way in which God had cared for them in the wilderness when they were vulnerable. Those listening to Ezra could feel part of something that was real and certain. It would have given them confidence to face the new challenges knowing that God was with them and was faithful to them.

So we need Scripture. The CV19 outbreak is exposing our fragilities, and alongside that Scripture reminds us that we are part of a larger story, which stretches back to the original creation and forward to a new creation. God has an overall plan despite all that we are going through and he promises to take care of us. And that is why we need the Scriptures to remind us of all this.

As Ezra finished reading, he suddenly realized that the people had started to cry. In v9-12 Ezra encourages them not to mourn or weep but to go and enjoy choice food and

sweet drinks. As the Bible was read to them it was like a lid being lifted and they encountered words of comfort and hope. They felt a sense of remorse and realized how far they had strayed. However, they felt, when they heard the scriptures, that they were in a safe space and could allow their emotions to surface. They could go away with a feeling of joy because they now understood more about what the Word of God said from what Ezra had taught them. They were a community that shared God's word, enabled and supported one another. We can do this today through our Home Groups and other groups in our Church Community. Nehemiah in v10 says "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks **and** send some to those who have nothing prepared". This is a reminder of our responsibility to be generous in sharing all the good things that God has given to us and to be aware of our neighbours' pain and to show support, and concern for one another.

In our second reading from 2 Timothy 3 we read v16 "All scripture is God breathed.....so that we may be equipped..". As Christians we need to give a high priority to reading the scriptures so we grasp what God is expecting us to become in whatever situation he puts us. As we read the Word of God it points us to Jesus. For those of us who are already on our journey of faith, it nourishes us and builds us up into stronger followers of Jesus. For those of us who do not yet believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the words in the Bible will point the way.

What do you expect from the Bible? Do we expect to find something that it is dreary and incomprehensible? Or do you expect to find something helpful, knowing that what has been written has relevance for you and me today?

We have to be aware when we are reading the bible that it is in fact a library of books. Some books are history, some are personal letters, some are prayers, some are parables, some is wisdom some is law. If we are reading a letter to a friend, which the Letter to Timothy is, we can begin to understand a little of the context of why Paul wrote as he did.

If we are reading Leviticus, a book of rules and laws, it is not easy for us to put ourselves back some 3-4 thousand years to the time that it was written.

As we grow in our understanding of the bible we find it points us to Jesus. It helps us to meet and to get to know him. In that way we come to realize what is wrong in our lives and the need to say sorry to God, turn our backs on all that harms us and accept that Jesus is Lord of our lives. God through his Son Jesus Christ has enabled this to happen, because Jesus took on Himself the sins of the whole world, and that includes us, when he died on the cross. God confirmed that he was not a criminal by raising him from the dead. We can share in that risen life if we come to him and say sorry for the things that we have done that separate us from him. Our salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ.

This morning let us ensure we continue to, or decide to, equip ourselves with the Good news written for us in the bible. Let's seek God, call on Him and allow him to show us how great is His love for us. "For the word of God is living and active". Hebrews 4:12