

Thoughts for Bible Sunday by Revd Janet Gasper

When we hear the 'Bible' what do we think of? A big black book? But the Bible comes in all shapes and sizes and has been translated into nearly 2000 languages and adapted for children. In fact the Bible comes to us as a library of 66 books: Jewish – Old Testament 39books; Christian – New Testament 27books. Some Bibles have a middle section containing intertestamental material of 20 books called the Apocrypha. The time span of the Bible is 1000 years – from 900 BC to 100 AD and its books tell of peoples' encounters with God. We know from our experience of a library that we need to sort out which section to go to, to find the book we want. So when we read the Bible we need to know what kind of writing we are dealing with in its books.

The Bible contains all kinds of writing because we meet God in all kinds of situations. So lets turn to 6 examples here of Bible books: see if we can spot the kind of writing.

Spot the book of the Bible!

The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork, day discourses it to day, night to night hands on the knowledge.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet he cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.

Paul and Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

1. Poetry (Book of Psalms, Psalm 19)
2. Story (Luke 15)
3. Philosophy (Ecclesiastes)
4. Adventure (Acts 21)
5. Letter (Ephesians 1,v1.)
6. Tora/Instructions (Deuteronomy 6)

It is the Tora that the people gathered to hear read by the scribe Ezra in our first reading and this passage shows us some important principles about the reading and hearing God's word in the Bible:

Reading and Hearing the scriptures is a corporate act to help strengthen the community. Every act of Christian worship must include a reading from the Bible – our scriptures belong to the

faith community and though we read them at other times on our own, they are not in the private possession of individuals and need to be shared.

Reading and hearing the Bible is for everyone – all the people, men, women and children were gathered in the rebuilt Jerusalem and assistance was given to enable everyone to understand. Today we have Bible notes and commentaries, sermons and study groups to help us to understand to understand the Bible.

Reading and hearing the Bible is a holy act accompanied by worship and Ezra has chosen a Festival Day for this gathering, underlining the principle that reading the scriptures is an act of worship in itself.

Reading and hearing the Bible provokes an emotional response. In the passage the people weep at first but their leaders encourage them not to be sad but to take strength in joy of the Lord and to celebrate.

In our Gospel reading another aspect of reading and hearing God's word is revealed as we are reminded that God can speak to us through signs and symbols. The passage refers to the promise of a final vindication for those who are faithful to God, a time when what is hidden is made known, as the new leaves on the fig tree indicate that summer is near.

At the time of Jesus writing was a skill of an elite group of scholars – the spoken word was far more significant than it is for us today and once a word was spoken it took on an

existence of its own. The word of God once spoken is done. In Genesis Chapter 1, God says: "Let there be light" and there was light. For the writers of the Bible, heaven and earth may pass away but God's eternal word remains forever.

I think above all this Sunday reminds us that if we are to be part of the Christian faith community we cannot avoid wrestling with the Bible. We may find part of it impossible to understand because try as we might, we cannot share the experiences of those who wrote its text. But we can lay our experiences, our glimpses of God, our troubles and fears alongside the Bible story and in that way we will discern something of the truth of God.

I leave you today with a fun way of reading the Bible – a kind of Biblical 'Bake Off'. To make this 'Bible cake' you need to explore the passages to find the ingredients. Try it, pass it on to others. Get to know your Bible library and have fun! *Rev Janet.*

Bible Cake

Heat oven to 150c (300f) Gas mark 2

2 teacups of 1 Samuel 30:12 (second ingredient)

2 cups of Nahum 3:12

½ cup of Numbers 17:8 (plus a few for decoration)

8oz (225g) of Psalm 55:21

2 cups of Jeremiah 6:20 (sugar!)

4 ½ cups of Kings 4:22

6 of Jeremiah 17:11

2 tbsp of 1 Samuel 14:25

1 pinch of Leviticus 2:13

2 tsps of Amos 4:5 (crumbs!)

1 cup of Judges 5:25 (final clause)

1/2cup of Judges 4:19 (first liquid)

Season with 2Chronicles 9:9

Grease and line 8" cake tin

Separate 1 (in list above) chop 2&3 – set aside

Blend 4&5 add 6 gradually

Beat in 7 and add 8,9 and 10

Stir in 1,2 and 3 Add 11 & 12 as necessary

Blend in 13. Put in prepared tin, decorate with a few flaked 3s.

Bake on low shelf for 3 ½ hours

If top browns prematurely, reduce heat to 140c (275f / Gas mark 1) and cover with greaseproof paper.

Eat with prayer and thanksgiving and resolve to follow the example of 2 Timothy 1:6!