**Sermon: Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 10 Oct 2021**

**Job 23:1-9, 16-17. Ps 22:1-15, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31**

‘The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joint from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (Heb.4:12).

In our Gospel reading Jesus is met by a man asking what he ought to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus speaks directly from the Old Testament, the law,– ‘you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honour you mother and father’ (Mark 10:19). . They are foundational to Christian thought. Here is Jesus the living, incarnate word of God in action, and he draws from his love of the law and passes on that knowledge to this enquirer. But Jesus goes a step further and I love the words and turn of phrase Mark uses from at verse 21a: ‘Jesus, looking at him, loved him’. Jesus looked not at the man, no I believe he looked into his eyes, into his very being and had compassion on this person because he understood the man’s heart and the difficulty he would face, the choice he would make.

Jesus, the logos, the Word of God continues speaking to the man, “You lack one thing, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come follow me”’ (Mark 10:21b). Ched Myers in his book *Binding the Strong Man* explains that this rich man ‘lacks one thing’. Jesus’ call to discipleship involves a certain amount of self-denial, (Take up your cross and follow me Matt 16:24-26). Jesus speaks of the man’s economic circumstance and uses four imperatives; get up, sell what you have, give it to the poor, come follow me. Ched Myers suggests this man’s wealth or property assumes he owns more than one piece of land, and as a land owner had immense social and political power in his community. It is not surprising then that upon hearing Jesus words he is shocked and walks away grieved in his heart. His wealth and landholdings prevented him from following Jesus words. He was in a manner of speaking ‘cut to the heart’.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword.

I have begun to read a book, *How to Eat Bread*: *21 Nourishing Ways to Read the Bible*.[[1]](#footnote-1) It might seem like a strange title but the author explains why she likens reading the Bible to eating bread. Bread is nourishing. Moreover, just as bread comes in so many different shapes and sizes and taste, the bible brings to us a great variety of writing, poetry, history, law, psalms, wisdom literature, prophets, gospels, epistles or letters, and much more.

The author poses the question ‘Why read the bible?’ Perhaps it might seems strange for those of us who have been Christian’s a long time to even ask such a question. Nonetheless, I agree with her question, why bother to read the bible. You may have your own answers, perhaps other question’s spring to mind. Let’s consider some of the ways the author believes what reading the bible offers us.

First and foremost ‘Jesus thought reading the Scriptures was important’.[[2]](#footnote-2) In our Gospel reading today, Jesus refers the rich man to scripture, to the law. Jesus often pointed people to the scriptures. The sayings of Jesus recorded for us in the Gospels are bits and pieces of what Jesus said and did. They matter because this is what the writers of the Gospels believed were important to record. What the Gospel writers also bring to our attention is the link between their writing and the Old Testament scriptures. The two are inextricably linked.

As the title of the book suggest, reading the bible is nourishing. It feeds our soul in a way that is different from reading other kinds of materials, even books on spirituality. The bible as I have pointed out, is a collection of books, written over a thousands of years. The stories, poetry and other types of literature are there for our benefit and growth as Christians. Some stories sit comfortably with us, while others prove far more challenging and others may seem troubling and unsettling. Nonetheless, when we read the bible we discover and meet God in trinity, from the Old Testament through to the end of the New Testament.

I don’t have enough space here and now to fully explore all the ways the author gives for the way the Bible is nourishing and fulfilling for us to read. In our Gospel reading today, we discover that God, in the person of Jesus Christ is interested in who we are. The rich man came enquiring how to receive eternal life. Instead, he moves away from Jesus disheartened and grieved. Something very real in his life prevented him to draw closer to God. Perhaps he believed his wealth would help him attain eternal life. We also discover that God, in the person of Jesus, has a heart of compassion, kindness and empathy. Jesus knew what was in this person’s heart. What made him tick. What he would struggle to let go of if he truly wanted to follow Jesus. The rich man discovered that Jesus word’s to him brought him face to face with what really guided his existence and the world he lived in.

What prevents us from getting closer to the Word of God, this Logos, Jesus, the Son of God? What confronts, angers, or grieves us as we read the bible. What surprises, delights and brings joy into our lives? It is worth reflecting on how we respond to what we read. Sometimes writing down our reflections, thoughts and ponderings can helps us discover more about the God we serve and perhaps even something about ourselves.

May God’s word be for us like a deep well springing up, keeping us close to God. I am looking forward to finishing this book, ‘How to eat bread’. From the little I have gleaned thus far, God’s word is to be a source of nourishment, a source of spiritual food, like bread that satisfies, not so much the body but the soul.

I pray that this coming week when you or I open up the scriptures we come to them with a renewed perspective. Looking for where God is speaking into our hearts as Jesus did for the rich man. Our response may mirror his, or it may lead to a change of heart or renew and grow our love of God in trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, *How to Eat Bread: 21 Nourishing ways to read the bible,* Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, *How to Eat Bread,* p. xiii [↑](#footnote-ref-2)