

Column – Bible Sunday (2020)

GPS devices in automobiles are a boon to modern-day motorists. They take a lot of stress out of getting to your desired location . . . but not always. A few weeks ago, I was using mine to find a residence in one of our large mountain subdivisions, and all it did was take me round in circles. In the end I had to call the family and get directions the old-fashioned way!

If you think about it, the Scriptures serve the same purpose as GPS devices. They keep us off wrong roads and onto right ones, those leading to life eternal. Even better, unlike the gadgets in our cars, they don't get discombobulated and take us in circles.

Using a different metaphor, the Psalmist says of God's Word Written: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The message is the same. Let the scriptures be your guide.

I am thinking today about the Bible because the Second Sunday in Advent (Dec. 6 in this year's calendar) has come to be known as "Bible Sunday". This designation comes from the collect (special prayer) appointed for this Sunday in the Book of Common Prayer. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer composed it in 1549 at a time when the importance of reading the Bible was being reasserted.

If you think about it, a Sunday emphasising the Bible fits well into the Advent scheme. It works like this: just as people of old time were prepared for the coming of the Messiah through the reading and study of the Scriptures (in their case our Old Testament); just so, we today are prepared and made ready for His Second Coming by the same means – through the reading and study of the Scriptures.

The apostle Paul makes a similar point when he writes: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Bible does indeed give us hope. It reminds us that history is not a mass of unrelated dates and events, but is actually going somewhere . . . that God has a plan, and that plan is being worked out with each passing day, week and year

. . . that a new order is waiting in the wings and will be revealed fully at Jesus' Second Coming.

Unfortunately, some Bible readers miss the big picture. They do so, at least partially, because they get so caught up in the stories that they never get to The Story.

Think about the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Each is important, and some may even contain interesting colours and patterns. Even so, the full glory of the puzzle is revealed only when the pieces are put together. So it is with the stories of the Bible. We dare not leave the pieces spread on the table.

As we seek to do this, it might be helpful to think of the Bible as a play with five acts. In Act 1 God creates the world good. In Act 2, something muddles things up (Genesis 3). A roadblock comes down in front of God's creation project which must be removed before God's plan can go forward. In Christian parlance this is called human sinfulness.

In Act 3, God begins a reclamation project when He calls a particular family – the family of Abraham. This group of people will be the means whereby He will put the world, torn apart by sin, back together again.

The drama then arrives at its great new moment with the coming of one particular member of Abraham's family – Jesus the Messiah. He takes the world's pain and sin upon Himself and exhausts it on the cross and in so doing makes a new beginning for the human race. This is Act 4.

You and I are now living in this fourth act. God's future has burst into the present, and we – if we have been united to the true King in faith and baptism – are part of this future. We, moreover, have a part to play in the present. We are to announce Jesus and be outposts of the Kingdom until the King returns.

Act 5 begins when Jesus appears the second time. Then, the roadblock placed in front of God's creation project in Genesis 3 will be removed. At that time, God will wipe away all tears, and death itself will be no more (Revelation 21:4). Hope lost will be hope regained.

Let's not be part smart; let's read the Bible for all its worth . . . on Bible Sunday, yes, but all year long.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us to our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (Collect for Second Sunday in Advent, Book of Common Prayer).

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.