

Advent 2 (2022)

"We are a Christian culture. We come from a Christian culture, and not to know the King James Bible is to be in some small way barbarian."

These are not the words of a wild-eyed American fundamentalist, or an Anglican archbishop, or a professor at a Christian college, or a Tea Party patriot.

Rather they come from the militant atheist Richard Dawkins.

Christians will certainly disagree with Dawkins on a great many things. Yet, in *this* case, we can only shake our heads and say, "He is right."

The Bible, in particular the monumental translation of 1611, is of enormous significance, religiously, literary and culturally.

From the Authorized Version (as it is sometimes called) we get such phrases as: "no peace for the wicked," "turned the world upside down," "a fly in the ointment," and "the blind leading the blind."

It occupies nearly 42 pages of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, only narrowly beaten by Shakespeare, with 45.

The Bible, in like manner, has tremendously influenced English Common Law, the system of jurisprudence which provides the foundation for the legal system in the United States (apart from the State of Louisiana).

For Christians, of course, the Bible is more than a cultural artifact. It informs our thinking about God and locates us on His map.

"Mine to tell me whence I came; mine to teach me what I am," says the hymn writer John Burton.

What about Anglicans? What do they / we believe about the Bible? ///

Well, we believe the Bible to be inspired, God breathed, and therefore authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine.

Thus, Article VI printed the back of the Book of Common Prayer says:

"Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be

required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”

The inspired text of scripture, moreover, provides the ‘stuff’ of our worship. Three-fourth of the Prayer Book comes directly from scripture, with the reminder echoing what is taught therein.

None other than the great John Wesley, the founder the Methodist movement, had this to say on the subject:

"I believe there is no liturgy in the World, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational Piety, than the Common Prayer of the Church of England.”

Furthermore, Anglicans read the Bible comprehensively. Our lectionary – both for Sundays and weekdays – take us on a journey through the whole Bible. We don’t just pick and choose the bits we like.

In addition to reading it comprehensively, we read it intelligently. We read the parts in light of the whole and in the company of those who have gone before and who stand beside us in the present.

Finally, we read it prayerfully and expectantly. Our great desire is for the Holy Spirit to take the words from the printed page and to write them on the tables of our heart.

Our church’s high view of scripture is reflected in today’s collect in which we pray that we may “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the good word of scripture.

Written for the 1549 BCP by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, this prayer reflects the desire of our Reformers to return the Bible to the people, to make it an open book. The inspiration for this prayer comes from today’s Epistle, at which I wish to look more closely in a minute.

This Epistle and Collect has, moreover, given rise to the Second Sunday in Advent being called “Bible Sunday”.

If you think about it, the theme of Bible Sunday sits nicely with the theme of Advent. As those of old time, the people of the OT, were prepared and made ready

for Christ's first coming through the reading and the study of scripture, so we today are we prepared and made ready for His Second Coming by the same means.

Let's turn now to this morning's Epistle, in particular its opening line:

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

“Things written aforetime” refers the record of God's dealings with His ancient people Israel recorded in the Old Testament.

“For our learning” means “to teach us.”

But, teach us what?

In context, Paul in this passage is addressing how members of the new community, the Church, are to live and relate to one another, even as they await our Lord's Second Coming.

Paul's teaching in this passage can be summarized like this: **Be hopeful and stay united.**

Let's begin with the first: Be hopeful. What give God's people cause for hope?

Is it not, at least in part, what God has done in the past? His faithfulness, not only in our own lives, but in history give us cause for hope. Think about it:

Prophecies relating to Jesus' first coming found in the OT were fulfilled with great precision and accuracy. Cannot we not expect those pertaining to His second coming found in the NT to be fulfilled in like manner?

And so, from God's past acts of faithfulness comes hope . . . meaning assurance.

History is not a jumble of dates and events. It is not a never-ending circle. It's going somewhere!

With Jesus' resurrection, the destruction of death, the great constant of history, is proclaimed and anticipated. New heavens and a new earth are coming.

So, no wringing of hands and walking around with heads hung low! Be hopeful.

Paul gives another admonition as well: Stay together. Don't get divided up in little factions.

“Be likeminded one toward another,” he tells his first readers. But what was to be the source of their unity?

It certainly was not come from their racial and cultural homogeneity. Some in the early church were Jews, others were Gentiles. Most were poor, but a few wealthy. And as today, some were extremely gifted, while others were rather ordinary.

So, what bound such a diverse group together and caused them to sit down at the same table? ///

My answer would be: their common need and a common Saviour.

I don't know if you have been in a surgical waiting room. If you have, you will likely have witnessed something remarkable. You will have seen those of different races, social backgrounds, educational levels drawing close to one another.

I have even seen people who never would have been in the same room together holding hands and praying.

Jesus does this on a larger scale in the local church. We have common needs. They include:

Our need for union with our Creator. Remember St. Augustine of Hippo's great line: **“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee”?**

We are not autonomous. Our humanness gets deconstructed when we act as if we were.

A second need is for forgiveness and healing, at all levels. Brokenness seems to be a part of the human experience.

In response, Jesus says – whoever you are, whatever your race or background: **“Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”**

A third need is for meaning. If these few short years that we have on earth is all that there is, what’s the purpose?

Tennyson perhaps said it best: **“Thou madest man, he knows not why, He thinks he was not made to die.”** ///

Only Jesus addresses all these needs. He bridges the gap between us and God. He addresses our brokenness by offering forgiving and healing. He brings meaning and purpose by His resurrection from the dead: Because He lives, we shall live also.

In the words of Phillip Books’ great Christmas hymn: **“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”**

Our unity, then, is found in Christ alone. He is the antithesis of our current political climate. He brings people together in a new way.

But this unity is not automatic. We have to work at it. Otherwise, Paul’s admonition to be likeminded would have been superfluous. ///

In closing, the Bible is a lot of things to a lot of people. The way we honor it best is not by offering platitudes about its greatness – Richard Dawkins can do that -- and goodness knows it is not by beating others over the head with it.

Rather, it is by believing on the One to whom it points – Jesus – and by striving to do His works.

A good place to begin might well be with the simple lessons taught in today’s Epistle: Be hopeful and stay united.