

Open the Book'

Neh 8: 1-4a & 8-12

Colossians 3:12 – 17

Matt. 24:30-35

Ps 119:9-16

Mahatma Ghandi said 'You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down, and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.'

So what can I say or do right now to encourage each one of us to cherish this document – this book?

Maybe an incentive? Perhaps the diocese could offer the clergy say £55.00 for each member of the congregation we single out in need of its healing properties? No – that would be far too expensive as every one of us is in need of it!

What about a free copy given out to everyone who steps over the threshold of our three church buildings? No – that still wouldn't work as I'm guessing most of us already have at least one copy hanging around somewhere gathering dust on the third shelf in the front room.

I think what we need to do is remind ourselves that this book is unique and therefore priceless!

This is summed up dramatically in a 2010 movie, starring Denzel Washington and Gary Oldman. In cinemas around the world - people watched the story of Eli unfold. A post apocalyptic, neo-western, action film about one man on a mission. Eli has in his possession the last remaining copy of the Bible, as all other copies were intentionally destroyed following a nuclear war. He explains that he was lead to the book by a voice in his head, which then directed him West to a place where it would be safe. The same voice promises Eli's personal protection throughout his journey. Then, in true American action movie style he battles the ever prevailing enemy in the guise of Carnegie, a power driven controlling despot who wants the book for his own devices – and at one point - takes ownership of it. But when Carnegie triumphantly unlocks the heavy brass clasp that binds its pages he is crushed, as the film delivers a brilliant twist, Carnegie discovers the whole of its contents are written in Braille!

Meanwhile, Eli having been critically wounded - during the battle with Carnegie and having surrendered the book, escapes making his way to the Golden Gate Bridge and then to Alcatraz - where we discover - against all that we have seen - that he is blind. It is here in the confines of the disused prison that he dictates all 66 books, each of the 1,189 chapters, every single 783,137 words of the King James Bible - to a small group intent on saving what they can of civilisation. The final scenes of the film depict a printing press and we witness pages of scripture reamed

off, bound and the first new copy of the bible completed and placed on a bookshelf.

Fantastic! This film has everything you hope a multi-million dollar movie would have! Drama, despair, hope, sadness, love, powerful music, a great storyline but as that book is placed on the shelf in the closing moments of this epic encounter I can't help but think of the sad reflection of the truth it represents.

For this book does not belong on a shelf! This book needs to be open – always ready to fill us with its contents - it's our bread - for daily use - not cake for special occasions.

The readings set for today encourage us to embrace this living Word.

In the book of Nehemiah we are told how Ezra – 'Opened the Book', the book of the Torah - he stood on a wooden platform specially made for the occasion and as the men, women and all who could understand gathered together beneath him in the square, he read aloud from daybreak till noon. It tells us the people listened attentively and they raised their hands and responded to all they heard.

Many of them were unable to read for themselves so here was Ezra reciting God's words and commands interpreting their meaning so all could benefit from their knowledge.

But what is the knowledge - what is it that is so special – special enough that they gathered in Ezra's day and special enough that we still gather here on a Sunday to

'open the book'?

'These are the Scriptures that testify about me' says Jesus in John 5:39.

From the pages of the Old Testament right through to the New - there is one supreme subject – Jesus! And the Salvation God offers through him.

Some believe that the Old Testament has no connection with the New but Luke's gospel tells us - that after Jesus had risen from the dead, he met two believers on the road to Emmaus and led them in a bible study – and it states clearly that - 'Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27).

The whole bible from beginning to end points to Jesus, the Old Testament pointing forward to him and the promise of his coming in the future - and in the New Testament - God proclaiming Jesus to be the one who fulfils all that was and still is promised.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Colossian church reminds us of the authority of scripture. **God is revealed** in the words and life of Jesus and

here Paul sets out a guiding set of principles by which all believers should live.

He encourages us to stop, think and change our attitudes.

As God's chosen people, his family, we are to be bound to one another by the virtues of love, forgiveness, unity, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, the very characteristics that were reflected by the children from our/the Primary School on Friday as we gathered here/at St.B's to celebrate Harvest. Throughout this term they've been looking at the fruit of the Spirit and it's message of wholeness and healing bringing about a peaceful acceptance of others - for through Christ - the body of the church where ever we are, where ever we meet should bear these principles. After all - we are made in his image - his likeness.

Paul continues - as we gather together let peace and thanksgiving reign in our hearts - so from the opening of our services to the end - allow the wisdom of God through the word of Christ Jesus to live in us - richly - teaching us and reminding us of the dangers and snares that are just waiting to trip us up. Through uplifting songs, hymns, prayers, readings - our worship should elevate us as believers through wisdom and the assurance of love - bringing glory to our God.

As we approach the seasons of Advent and Christmas let's be encouraged to 'make room' to 'open the book' and 'open our hearts and minds' to the living word.

The reading from Matthew's gospel tells of a time of the final coming of Jesus - it's a warning to prepare ourselves for the ultimate promise - his return and his reign - for all material things will pass away but his word and all that is spiritual will never pass away.

'Your word Lord, stands forever, it is as firm as the heavens' the psalmist tells us - (Psalm 119: 89).

Words have great power - we can use them to build up and to tear down. They are transformational - God breathed life into all creation with his word - so please - let's not be caught out like Carnegie in the film - we might own a copy of the greatest document ever published but it's no good just possessing it we need to 'open the book' and familiarise ourselves with it's wonders.

I began with a quote so I'll finish with one too, in the hope that each of us will see our bibles as something to be cherished, loved, and used.

John Wesley said

'I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. A few moments hence, I am no more seen - I drop into eternity. I want to know one thing. The way to heaven. God has given us a way, written in the Good book, The Bible, O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God!'

Veronica Green

