

Homily for Bible Sunday – Sunday 23rd October 2016 from Suzanne E Bradley
at St Peter's Morning Prayer

I had two options for today's service – the Last Sunday after Trinity or Bible Sunday – so I chose the latter. I chose Bible Sunday as it gives us a chance to celebrate the Bible and how a book that was begun to be written about nearly 3500 years ago is, I think, most relevant to our lives today, and will be in generations to come.

I also had a few homilies to choose from, but I decided to pick out the best bits and also give you some of the many facts about the Bible.

I begin with the comment for Bible Sunday from the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) Sunday by Sunday Guide (Issue 77) (a little controversial in places, I think):

The Bible is a dangerous book..., but gives great comfort and inspiration for living. It is the Word of God in written form, and can be treated with reverence or contempt, read literally or metaphorically. No one can doubt its influence or its beauty, its unity and its diversity. Bible Sunday focuses on this and more. On the other hand, every Sunday is Bible Sunday, so central is it to Christian liturgy (*words in our services*), hymnody and life.

Bishop Graham, in his sermon podcast (Diocese of Worcester website) for Bible Sunday last year (Sunday 25th October 2015) writes: "*What an incredible book the Bible is. In fact a whole library of books containing history and poetry, ancient stories and law and mystery and lament, biography and instruction. - And it's brim full of human stories with the full gamut of real human emotions – of love and joy, hate and greed and loss, grief and hope.*

A book in which we find ourselves and our lives tangled up in its stories. A book that has been used to bring peace and to justify war. To broker liberation for nations and to preach slavery for millions. To justify probably every joy and evil you can name.

No wonder it's often a puzzle. We have to wrestle with it and let its meaning soak into you, if it is to yield up its secrets and share with you its holiness.

As we break open the scriptures we see and hear and listen to the living word, transforming the situation of our lives. Jesus longs for us to see and accept the signs of God's presence all around us."

Here are just some of the many facts about the Bible (taken from various websites via Google search engine typing in *facts about the Bible*):

- The Bible was written over approx. 1500 years from about 1450 BC to about 100 AD by about 40 men.
- Chapters – of which there are 1189 – were introduced to the Bible in 1238 by Cardinal Hugo de S. Caro. Verse divisions were not added until 1551 by Robertus Stephanus.
- The first translation of the Bible into English was in 1382 AD by John Wycliffe.
- The Bible was the first major book to be printed; in 1454 AD by Johannes Gutenberg.
- Over 773,000 words – depending on the translation version of the Bible depends on exactly how many words there are.
- The longest book in the Bible is Psalms and the longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119 with 176 verses – we sang just 8 verses this morning. The shortest chapter of the Bible is Psalm 117 with only 2 verses – also Psalm 117 is the middle chapter of the Bible.

Some websites claim that The Bible is the best-selling book in the world of all time, but is usually omitted from lists as, to quote one website “sales numbers for these books are nearly impossible to track because many are given away by churches or governments. Additionally, these books have often been printed by a wide range of publishers over centuries, many of them unreported”. (<http://jamesclear.com/best-books/best-selling>)

The first five books of the Old Testament – books of the Law given to Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are called Moses 1, Moses 2 etc. in Germany – it is Moses who wrote these first 5 books.

The Bible – originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek – has been translated into over 2000 languages, besides some books being translated into dialects – there is even a Black Country version – there is the Old Testament – in 2 parts and the Gospels.

God is not mentioned in the book of Esther or in the Song of Solomon (OT).

A way to remember how many books are in the Old and New Testaments and the Bible as a whole:

- Remember the number 39
- There are 39 books in the Old Testament
- Now take the 3 and 9 as separate numbers and multiply them: $3 \times 9 = 27$
- There are 27 books in the New Testament
- $39 + 27 = 66$ books in the Bible.

I think that The Bible speaks to us in so many ways which no other book can – or rather God speaks to us...

Recently I have heard passages of scripture – be it in church or even on the TV – in a soap – yes, in a soap – where a Bible passage being recited has spoken to me – the word of God telling me what I needed to hear.

So, I leave you with a few verses from one of my favourite Bible passages:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.