

Sunday, October 21, 2018

Isaiah 40:6-8

James 1:19-25

2 Timothy 3:15-17

#### Celebrating God's Word in Canada

We sing "The B-I-B-L-E" a wonderful song about God's inspired words recorded over hundreds of years ago about people who lived lives often which weren't perfect but who still believed and lived with faith in God. Yet the role of the Bible in Canadian culture has changed in the last 50 years, or even the last 5 and so one might wonder why does the Bible Society continue to exist?

Today is Bible Sunday as requested and promoted by the Canadian Bible Society whose main purposes are to "translate without doctrinal note, publish, and distribute the Christian Scriptures, and to promote and encourage the use of the Bible, throughout Canada and worldwide in cooperation with members of the United Bible Societies and other organizations." These other organizations are churches, church camps and individual groups who believe it is important to have Bibles in the hands of people to read it. These groups include Canadian institutions as they meet people where they are. Prisons, the Canadian Forces and new citizens to Canada all receive Bibles through the ministry of the Canadian Bible Society. But why is this organization first established in Canada in 1906 still existing when many people in this country do not profess any faith? We must turn to the pages of the Bible for answers to this question.

A Bible Quiz: How many Books in Bible? 66 in the Old Testament 39 in the New Testament 27. What is the first book of the Bible? What is the Last Book of the Bible? Which book is in the middle? What is the main story of the Bible—beginnings to end times of God's relationship with his creation and specifically people. God being the creator, redeemer and Spirit; Father, Son and Spirit, Creator- Jesus- Spirit; who was, is and is to come.

It was many years ago that God inspired people to write down the events that they had been taught as children—oral history and tradition of the stories of beginnings, of the Promised Land and of how God interacted with people through history. The Ancient Jewish and New Testament Christian communities were committed to reading and understanding scripture as this was a foundational spiritual activity. In Deuteronomy 31:9-12 Moses commands the people of Israel to gather together to listen and learn to fear God and to follow the words of the law. This would have been by speaking and listening to what was shared. So from that time onward God commanded that the text of His voice be repeated. As Jewish worship traditions developed

standards emerged for the reading of various scriptures in the synagogue. This of course was affirmed and reaffirmed in temples throughout history. Many years and generations came. Jesus was born and lived according to the Jewish teachings of scriptures. And after his death and resurrection, it was Paul who established churches as places where people gather together to hear his teachings and then they were to pass it on to other churches. Paul asked Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of scripture to preaching and to teaching. Both Old Testament readings were shared as well as the new writings referring to Jesus.

But why do we do this? Gather together to listen to scriptures? Isaiah puts it very clearly. The grass withers the flowers fall but the word of our God stands forever. Many things will come into being, live for a while, then die but God's word, his teachings, stories of how he interacted and interacts with people today—never will be destroyed. His word stands forever.

This is important for the ancient Israelites and for the early church and it remains valid for our churches today. God's Word is essential for the church to thrive and for individual believers to grow in their faith. For many of us present receiving a Bible is a rite of passage but for others to have a Bible translated into their heart language is only a dream.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened fresh perspectives for Canadians on the injustices that Canada inflicted on indigenous people in the past. Where there once was sadness there is now renewed hope for revitalization of language and culture, centred on the translation of and engagement with scriptures. In 2012 the Bible translation into Inuktituk was completed and the Inuit people heard the message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in their language for the first time. Translations of the scriptures continues today as there are over 4000 languages still awaiting the completion of a single, understandable book from the Bible.

But why do people want to learn scripture and read the Bible? There are many copies of the Bible available but my colleagues and I know that Bible literacy is at a very concerning low. People do not read the bible as we once did—maybe on Sundays you might hear up to 3 passages but often just one.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he instructs the young leader by saying, "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." You have been taught since you were little that the scriptures/ the words of the Bible will help you to have faith in Jesus and be saved.

And Paul continues—All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NIV) in the Contemporary English Version as on the cover of your

announcements this morning—we read—“Everything in the Scriptures is God’s Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The scriptures train God’s servants to do all kinds of good deeds.”

God’s Word is written by the hands of people who were inspired to write it down. These words help us to live out our daily lives. The Bible also aids us in those times when we might not want to praise God but cry in anger, or fear or wonder with hope about why God wanted the prophets to write about Jesus’ birth 400 years in advance? Or even to have John of Patmos experience visions of end times?

But God’s Word does more than this—it is a teaching manual, a book of comfort, of stories that we like to hear—everything from romance, to wars and battles, sibling rivalry to poems of love, statements of wisdom and of course the story of Jesus birth, life and teachings and his death and resurrection.

But are we reading it as we should?

The Canadian Bible Society provides scriptures for special programs and situations. Here in Glenwood Church we celebrate baptisms, new members, and confirmation of youth by presenting Bibles to each person. But we also make available for others these same Bibles for gifts, celebrations and outreach purposes as an outreach for the CBS. For 4 years Glenwood church has been the location where people might come and get resources for the bibles for baptism program but also pamphlets, learning tools, daily Bible reading guides and general info. We have also received thousands of used postage stamps. These used stamps are collected, sorted, and sold to stamp collectors. All the money goes to distribute Bibles in prisons.

The Bible is a guide for life and handling many of its problems and celebrations. How often we read the words and understand them helps us to discern who we are in today’s world and by whose guidance we find our strength and our hope. It is filled with valuable knowledge about living this life and preparing for the next. It is about faithful people living life and testing boundaries with God. It is about God’s promises and covenants with His people and those who profess their faith in Him. It is not about denominations of churches but about the church itself assembling people to hear what God says to us all.

A missionary in Africa was teaching an adult Bible class and when it came time for the exam, he reminded the students: “Don’t cheat!” Soon after he handed out the exams, however, he found that the pupils almost immediately turned to one another sharing answers. The teacher was confounded by their actions- astounded, most of all that they would ignore his instructions and violate such an important code of ethics. But after warning them again, the pupils still talked

among themselves. Finally a local colleague assisted him by explaining what was happening. "Don't cheat" to them meant; "don't withhold valuable knowledge from one another!"

I wonder how many of us are cheating ourselves and our family members and friends about the valuable knowledge God's Word- the Bible has for us all. Sharing and celebrating God's Word is infinitely valuable to the people around the world who are seeking to be healed by its touch and inspired by God.

The Bible is available to us in many forms even at the tap of our fingers- but often it is a blessing that we often forget to appreciate. We have the written Word that gives life, hope and peace. People around the world are searching for something and seeking answers that only God can provide through His Word.

As we turn to the pages of the Bible there is hope for a revival of God's Spirit acting and leading many to Jesus. Reaching out individually to bring the scriptures in the heart languages of Canadian people seems impossible but the Bible Society has been doing this almost 120 years. As we too seek God's love, let us not cheat ourselves from finding out more. Let us look to God's Word and read it so that we might be changed and inspired by God!

#### PRAYER

Loving God we praise you for your inspired word to us the Bible and thank you for the work of the Bible Societies around the world as they diligently and cooperatively translate the Good News in heart languages.

We pray O God that you would inspire us to take the time to read the Bible, learn from the stories about other people and to hear your message for us today.

Help us to grow in faith with you. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.