



## THOUGHTS FOR BIBLE SUNDAY

25 OCTOBER 2020

*The Bible relevant today*

Nehemiah 8:1-12, Colossians 3:12-17

For Mothering Sunday I had written notes for two sermons, which could not be preached as the church had been closed, so I wrote up précis for publication on the church website, and I carried on during 'lockdown' doing that for each service at which I had already agreed to preach, and then produced one or two extra. That was partly to provide material that others could use for worship at home, but partly because it gave me an excuse for looking more closely at the readings from the bible set for the various days. One thing I noticed was that I realised I felt more direct connection with the readings than usual. Perhaps that was because the usual cosy insulation from the realities of existence that modern society brings seemed less substantial and certain, and I felt closer to the folk in the bible stories in terms of precariousness of life. You may have felt that too, if you used the *Worship at Home* form of Evening Prayer, with its set psalm 91. I have often said the psalm in the course of the Office of Compline and found it rather quaint, "He shall deliver you from the deadly pestilence.", "You shall not be afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the sickness that destroyeth in the noonday", "neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling". That sense of the imminent danger posed by infectious disease has surely been done away by modern medicine, I used to think. I now know different. Never before have these words, from well over 2,000 years ago, seemed so relevant to my life!

It ought not to surprise us – the books of the bible, in their different ways, were intended to impact the lives of the reader. They recorded not dry facts of history, or even entertaining stories of bygone days, but of things that were thought to be of vital importance to individuals and to the 'people of God' corporately. Although set in their own time and describing events in societies different from our own, they still deal with the eternal questions of human origins, human destiny, human relations with one another, with creation and with God.

We see this in the first lesson today. The Exiles have returned from Babylon and the temple in Jerusalem is being rebuilt, under Nehemiah – the people are gathered together (for once men and women!) and 'the law of Moses' is read to them, and explained by Ezra and others, and people are overcome with what they hear, and then go off for a feast (taking portions to those unable to attend in person). The scripture, the bit of the Bible, which was read to them, is the book of Deuteronomy, and its great message is of the one-ness of God. The people are transformed by what they hear about God, and it sets their hearts ablaze. This is the sort of effect that the Bible can have on the lives of believers. From its words, people can gain an insight into the heart of God that can transform, that can make sense of what previously seemed obscure or confusing. There are thousands, millions, who have been spoken to in this way over the centuries, whose lives have changed course because of what they have read in the Bible.

For Christians it is, unsurprisingly, likely to be things in the New Testament that speak most directly and profoundly to us. S. Paul, in his letter to the church at Colossae, which provided our second lesson today, prays that the folk there will let the word of Christ dwell richly in them and it will lead them to a profound sense of gratitude to God, so this Bible Sunday pray that those same words may dwell richly in us, yielding a harvest of gratitude and love.

Clive Lemmon