

A sermon for Bible Sunday.

Today is Bible Sunday, which is the last of the Sundays after Trinity – also known rather prosaically as ‘Ordinary Time’. From here on, the Church’s calendar becomes increasingly directed towards to Advent and Christmas, pausing along the way for All Saints and Remembrance.

The Eucharist,
the Mass,
the Lord's Supper
the Communion...



What's it all about?

So this seems a good Sunday to bring to a close our series on the meaning of the Eucharist, or the Mass, or the Holy Communion.

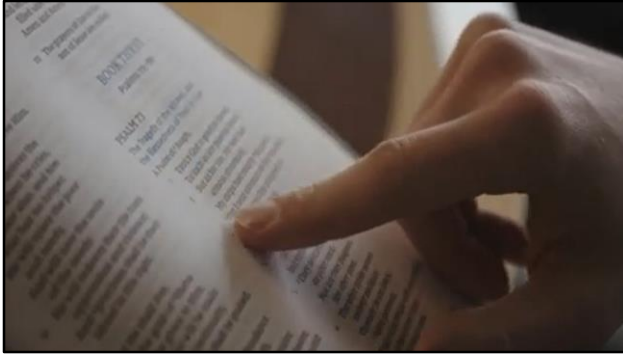
BASICALLY - Two liturgies in one

Word & Sacrament



I hope you've been finding it helpful. Over five sermons – so far - we've thought about the general shape of the service. We considered the way that it is made up of different sections, the liturgies of the Word and of the Sacrament. We've focused-in on some of the key component parts, including the Eucharistic Prayer, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. There's still much more to do...and many more sections to focus on. But perhaps we'll do those in the new year!

My intention is to bring these six sermons together into an illustrated booklet, including the slides that I know you've all been finding helpful. But I'm not making any promises to do that quickly!



Today, for our last expedition into The Mass, I want to talk about the Bible. Many people don't realise just how much of our service is, in fact, taken directly from the pages of Scripture. Of course, we have the straight Bible readings, and the sermon during which you can all take a little nap!

But did you know that almost every other line of the service we say together also comes from the Bible? Apart from the Creed and the Collect (and even they are based on Biblical teaching), just about everything else we say and repeat together comes directly off the pages of Scripture.

Petitions
UK Government and Parliament

The petition to remove French words from British passports consists almost entirely of words of French or Norman origin.

Petition

Remove all French words from the cover of new British passports.

The vote to leave the EU means people voted to Take Back Control. Control of their borders, their culture and their language. Whether "Dieu et mon droit" and "Honi qui mal y pense" have existed as mottos in England for ages is irrelevant. French is an EU language and has no place on a UK passport.

[Sign this petition](#)

170 signatures

Show on a map 10,000

Let's deal with the word 'Bible', itself, first.

When I was a teenager, I spent many a happy summer in France. When I wasn't chasing French girls, choking on French cigarettes, or letting off French fire-crackers in bus stations, I had a bit of time to learn the language. Even as a teenager, I was intrigued to find out how many words we have in common – not least since we were conquered by the 'Duc de Normandie' in 1066. There are many, of course. 'Baby' is 'bebe' in French. When you go on a 'picnique' or eat a 'salade' or catch a bus from a 'depot', you are using one of the 29% of common English words and phrases which are actually French. Sacre bleu!



‘Bible’, is one such word. It means ‘library’ or ‘collection of texts’...and that should give us the greatest clue to what the Bible *actually* is. The Bible as we have inherited it was largely written, by many different hands, over a period of perhaps 1,000 years, up to and including the century after Jesus. Some parts, or at least some stories and individual lines, are believed to be much older still. The Hebrew Bible – what we call the Old Testament – covers a period of some 4,000 years of history, beginning with the mythical creation of the world.

Now let me pause there, and explain what I mean by using the word ‘mythical’ to speak about the Creation. For I realise that this is a hot topic!

Myth - Oxford Reference

A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.

From: 'myth' in The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable

A myth is defined by the Oxford dictionary as '*A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events*'.

The Genesis account of creation very precisely fits that description. First, it is most definitely a 'traditional story'. In *fact* it is two 'traditional stories'...

Comparisons and Contrasts	
Genesis 1:1 – 2:4	Genesis 2:4 – 25
Man and woman are created at the same.	God created man first and then later created woman so that man may have a companion.
God creates the Earth (heavens, vegetation, animals) everything in it before He creates man.	God creates man first and then fills in the universe with plants, animals, etc.
God creates man in His own image.	Man is made from dust before God breathes life into him. Then, God creates woman from the rib of man.
On the seventh day, God rested.	God created the Tree of the Forbidden Knowledge.
Man is given dominion over all of God's creations.	God gives man dominion over the garden of Eden but cannot eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Many people miss, or just do not realise, that the first two chapters of Genesis are *two* different creation stories, in which the order of creation is entirely different. In chapter one, God is portrayed as creating the Universe, the World, the plants and then the animals. Only when he has done all that does he create Man – the pinnacle of his creative work.

But in chapter two, nothing is said about the Creation of the Universe. Rather, a mythical God creates a mythical garden, and in it he places The Man. *Then* and only *then*, does he create animals, which he brings to the Man, one by one, to see what the Man will name them.



The writer of Genesis has clearly picked up two great Creation stories, and like any decent editor, he has placed them side by side, to let the reader be touched and inspired by them both.

They are not intended to be read as scientific treatise. They are not *True* in the sense of being objective, scientific, provable fact. But they *are* True in the sense that they point us to deeper truths...

The TRUTH of Genesis

- We are made (we don't appear from nowhere)
- We have a responsibility for creation
- God is deeply present
- We have a choice about how we decide to live

the truth that we are *made* (we don't just appear out of nowhere).

the truth that we have responsibility to care for creation

the belief that God is deeply present and at the core of all creation.

The truth, embodied in the fruit of the tree in the Garden, that we all have a choice to make about how we chose to live.



There are other great myths – traditional stories - in the Bible too. Some are more obvious than others. There's the story of the Noah and the Great Flood, of course...which is paralleled by the Babylonian story of Gilgamesh.

Much of the story of *Abraham* has mythical qualities...stories that point us to a deeper meaning than objective fact alone. Jacob too – remember last week's excursus about wrestling with an angel? Even the foundational story of Moses and the Exodus is generally agreed to be a myth - not least because no significant reference to that story has ever been found among the libraries of Egypt.

Comparing the Four Gospels				
	The Synoptic Gospels			John
	Matthew	Mark	Luke	
Author	Disciple	"Peter"	"Paul"	Disciple
Likely date	55-70 AD	50-65 AD	55-70 AD	80-90 AD
Place of writing	Syria, Palestine	Rome	Rome/Greece	Ephesus
For who	Jews	Romans	Greeks	Christians
Theme	Messiah	Redeemer	Perfect man	(Son of) God
Emphasis	Prophecies	Actions	Humanity	Divine
Genealogy	Abraham – Joseph	-	Adam – Mary	The Word = God
Perspective	Historical			Theological
Material	Shared and Unique (Matthew 25%, Mark 10%, Luke (50%))			Mostly unique (> 90%)
Chronology	Only one Passover mentioned			Three Passovers
Geography	Judea and Galilee (Galilee more emphasis)			Mostly Judea
Relationship to other gospels	Complementary			Supplementary

It is worth reflecting that even among the most recent stories in the Bible – the Gospels – objective, scientific truth is often the last thing on the mind of the writer. The Gospels openly contradict each other, in many ways. They take place over different timescales to each other. Events happen in different orders, or over different timescales, and the details of those events are often changed from one Gospel to another.

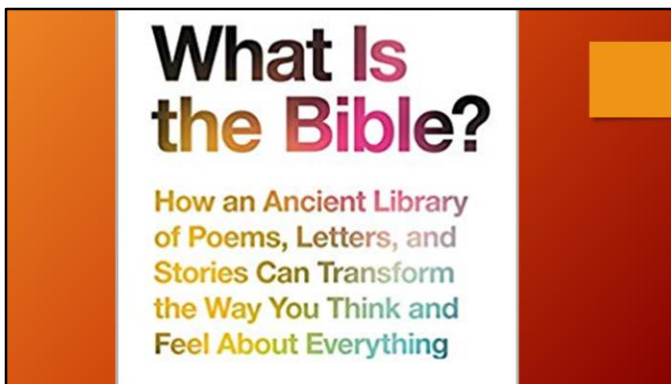


"It doesn't matter whether something *happened*,
It matters that it *happens*, today, right now, to you and me"

Paraphrase of Rob Bell

But ancient historians were not like modern historians. For one thing, they didn't have access to the huge range of historical documents that we have. They had to rely on hand-me-down oral stories, many of which had become elaborated, and changed in the telling. Ancient historians were far more interested in what these stories *meant* than whether or not a certain event actually happened.

In other words, to paraphrase a favourite theologian of mine, "it is not important whether something happened. It matters that it *happens*...today, right now, to you and me."



Time is once more our enemy. There is much more I'd like to say about the Bible...about its different forms of literature, for example. For not only does the Bible contain a mythical form of history, it also contains prophecies, and poetry, sermons and enormous wisdom. But those topics will have to wait for another day!

The Bible's Purpose

- To open our hearts to deeper truth
- To teach, admonish, encourage and inspire
- To show us how to live today
- To prepare us for Eternity in God's presence



What I hope you'll take away from this brief glimpse into the real truth of the Bible is this: the Bible's purpose is not to teach us historical or scientific fact. Its purpose, inspired by the Spirit of God, is to open our hearts and our souls to the deeper and more profound truths at the heart of our very existence. Its purpose is to teach us, to admonish us, to encourage us, and to inspire us along the journey of faith. Its purpose is to teach us how to live today, and to prepare us for an eternity in the arms of our Creator.

Amen.