

## Bible Sunday October 25<sup>th</sup> 2020

We have all had to think differently about many things during this very difficult year, and we are probably going to have to make some of these changes permanent, or at least long-term. I have certainly found this hard. I am used to being able to go out when and where I want, shop where I like for either a whole week's groceries or just a few odds and ends, visit people and places as I choose, go and browse in the library and so on. I do appreciate being in such a lovely area, with country parks within walking distance, but I have missed going further afield into the Peak District or away on holiday. And we all know how we have had to 'do church' very differently for the last few months. All churches have been closed, no normal services or meeting with friends from the same church, weddings and baptisms off and funerals taking place in the churchyard only. It has all seemed very strange, but I think that one of the things that this has done is to make us take responsibility for our own faith and practice more intensely, rather than expecting clergy to provide everything for us. Most churches have been producing services and talks on-line and this has been very valuable, especially as these have been reaching people who would not normally have come to church. It has meant, however, that church members who are not online have been 'disenfranchised' and have probably been feeling very isolated. I hope though that we have all found more time and opportunity for prayer, reading etc. During the beginning of lockdown I started thinking a lot about sacred spaces – it's easy to have taken church attendance for granted and assume that is the only or main way of Christian living. Of course it's important, but not the only way as we have all been finding out. God is everywhere so by definition any place, every place is sacred, a point of contact or focus with God, it just needs us to bring out attention to it and to think what we need there. No doubt we all have Bibles, but other resources are useful too, such as prayer books, reading aids such as those produced by the Bible Reading Fellowship, and on-line resources for those who have the connection.

Bible Society has also been doing things differently recently. We take for granted its work in translating and distributing Bibles, but the Society has also been responding to situations in other ways. For example those working with Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land have also been giving hygiene kits, face masks, food packs and medicine. Many Palestinians are in desperate situations, having lost land or jobs, and having no means of support. The situation in Mali is also grim. The Bible-a-Month bulletin for Aug/Sept this year referred to Mali as 'one of the most unsafe countries in the world', due to political instability, poverty, poor infrastructure and terrorism and now the coup has made the situation even worse. The head of Bible Society in Mali, Jacques Dembele, has asked for prayer – Christians are in a very small minority in the country and are therefore in an even more difficult situation during political unrest. There are also difficult situations at home, in different ways. Many people in prison in Britain have been confined to their cells 23 hours a day because of the Covid crisis but Bible Society is continuing the work in prisons which has always been part of its outreach, and is not only providing Bibles to prisoners, but running the Bible Course, in some prisons broadcast into prisoners' cells.

At the same time the traditional work is continuing. In August this year, the 700 milestone was reached – the full Bible is now available in 700 languages. There are some 7000 languages in the world, but many of them are spoken by comparatively small numbers of people, so the 700 mark means that 70-80% of people in the world now have the complete Bible in their own tongue. Bible Society also continues to make the Scriptures available in different ways - the Digital Bible Library enables hundreds of millions of people to access Scripture through websites and apps, and has recently reached the milestone of bringing together 2,500 texts in 1,622 languages used by over 5.7 billion people.

The Society is struggling with increased needs and reduced income at the moment. Much of their work has been hampered by the Covid pandemic. Bible Society shops and centres have been closed, so there has been no income from the sales of Bibles and none of the usual communication with drop-in enquirers. Bible distribution has been stopped or reduced in many regions, and the work is dangerous for staff in many countries. Funding is down because of the closure of churches. Bible Society is really worth supporting – in thanks for the resources and freedom to us that we enjoy, and to extend these blessings to others. An easy way to do this is to join the Bible-a-Month club. A few pounds every month does add up without making a large dent in our personal finances, and you receive a regular bulletin giving information about the work. Information on the Society's website ([biblesociety.org.uk](http://biblesociety.org.uk)) or by post from: Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, SN5 7DG.