Bible Sunday 2025

What do Picadilly Circus, Times Square, and downtown Osaka Huge have in common? Adverts. In each of these places, neon billboards, flashing lights and giant TV screens fill every corner, all advertising something. Companies pay thousands upon thousands of dollars to display their adverts there, and it's usually only the big names, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, TDK, who can afford to do so.

Our world today is full of signs. There are road signs, warning signs, adverts. If you look around here in church there are a great deal of different signs. Outside of here, many of these signs compete for our attention, and all trying to influence us in some way. Television, newspapers, social media, even the shop windows we walk past every day - each one tells us something about what we're supposedly missing, what we should buy, or even who we should be.

Today, on Bible Sunday, we take time to give thanks for another kind of sign; one not designed to sell, but to transform. We give thanks for this remarkable little book, the Bible, and we pray for all those who work to bring it into the hands of people who, for one reason or another, don't yet have access to it. It's good that we do this, because the Bible has shaped the world in ways that no advertising campaign ever could. It has changed countless lives, influenced nations, and guided homes and hearts for centuries. Of course, despite its importance, Christians don't always agree about how exactly we should read or use it. There are many different interpretations, and every believer seems to have their own approach. But one thing we can all agree on is this: the Bible is powerful.

Imagine being given a hand grenade as a gift. No matter how beautifully it's wrapped, it's still a dangerous thing. The Bible is dangerous too, not because it might blow up in your hands as you hold it, but because it can explode in your mind and your heart. That "explosion" can change opinions, open eyes, and stir hearts. People who are willing to be changed are always a little dangerous to those who want the world to stay the same. I believe I have said this before from this pulpit but the writer Neil Gaiman once said that fiction is dangerous, because it allows you to explore ideas you can't explore in real life. It expands the mind. If that's true for fiction, how much truer must it be for words that we believe are inspired by God himself?

Ask a hundred Christians how we should understand the Bible, and you'll probably get a hundred different answers. But broadly speaking, most would agree on this: the Bible reveals God to us, and through it, we learn about who God is, and who we are in relation to him. From the very beginning of time, we are told "In the beginning, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." And eons later, after humans have multiplied on the earth and already various civilisations have risen and fallen, we are told: later: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… and the Word became flesh and *lived among us*."

God speaks, and life begins. God speaks, and comes to dwell amongst that life, take on that life, be part of that life and nothing will ever be the same again. By reading this story, we understand something of his nature, his creativity, his love. A love that we can't do without. Advertisers try to convince us that we're missing something. If we had everything we needed, after all, we wouldn't buy their products. The Bible offers a very different answer to the question "What are you missing?" St Augustine once said, *"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you, O God."*

The Bible points us to the One who can fill that restlessness—the One who completes what is missing.

A pastor once described the Bible as *"Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth."* It's a slightly cheesy acronym, but it makes a good point! The Bible gives us guidance for how to live well. It contains laws and commandments—like the Ten Commandments and Paul's letters, but it also gives wisdom through stories, parables, and proverbs.

I always feel a little sad when people try to take every word of the Bible purely literally. The Bible's beauty lies in its depth—in its poetry, its stories, its songs, and the way it reflects the full range of human life before God. It's not just an ancient record; it's a living, breathing story that wraps around us like a warm blanket, guiding us throughout our lives.

Each of us carries stories within us—the story of our families, our nation, our own lives—and we also carry the great story of faith. We are part of the same story as the people of Israel, the first Christians, the reformers, and all who have gone before us. The Bible helps us remember who we are, and the story we belong to.

The world has changed enormously since the days the Bible was written. Society looks different; the Church looks different. The world can sometimes feel like a stormy sea, constantly shifting and tossing us about. That's why we hold on to the things that endure; objects, traditions, or words that remind us who we are.

The Bible is one of those anchors. Its words have remained constant, even as our world has changed. That doesn't mean we should stop thinking critically or take everything literally. But it does mean that, amid the noise and confusion of modern life, Scripture offers us a steady voice, a light that helps us stay on course.

When the people of Israel returned from exile, they gathered to hear the Law of Moses read aloud. They knew that within those words was something that would unite them, guide them, and help them start afresh. After their time in exile, they approached Scripture with new hearts and new energy, eager to listen and learn again.

Perhaps that's our challenge this Bible Sunday: to approach Scripture afresh—to read it again with open eyes and open hearts. To let it guide us, to let it steady us, and to let it draw us closer to the God who speaks through its pages.

The Bible remains our guide, our anchor, and our story.
And for that, we give thanks.

Amen.