

In Thomas Cramer's original 1549 Book of Common Prayer,
this collect is for the 2nd Sunday Advent

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be
written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise
hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that,
by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace
and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which
thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ...

The language is carried over exactly in the traditional collect
for Proper 28, The Sunday closest to November 16.

What we can conclude from this is

that from the very beginning of our Anglican faith,
the Holy Scriptures were to be revered and used.

The Bible in use in Cramer's time was the first "authorised version",
in English, known as the Coverdale's Great Bible
(1539) commissioned in the reign of King Henry VIII.

The Great Bible was prepared by Myles Coverdale,
working under commission of Thomas, Lord Cromwell,
Secretary to Henry VIII and Vicar General.

In 1538, Cromwell directed the clergy
to provide "one book of the bible
of the largest volume in English,
and the same set up in some convenient place
within the said church that ye have care of,
whereas your parishioners may most commodiously resort
to the same and read it."

Of course, in those days Bibles were scarce
and very costly to the extent that in most churches
the Bible was chained to the pulpit
so that it would not be stolen.

The only remnant of the Coverdale Bible
in our current Book of Common Prayer is the Psalter.
The Psalms are from the Coverdale edition.

It was followed by the Geneva Bible (1560),
notable for being the first Bible divided into verses
and the Bishop's Bible (1568),
which was an attempt by Elizabeth I
to create a new authorised version.

In January 1604, James VI and I convened
the Hampton Court Conference,
where a new English version was conceived
in response to the problems of the earlier translations
perceived by the Puritans.

King James commissioned 47 scholars to work on the new version.

The scholars worked in six committees,
two based in each of the University of Oxford,
the University of Cambridge, and Westminster.

The committees included scholars with Puritan sympathies,
as well as High Churchmen.

Forty unbound copies of the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible
were specially printed so that the agreed changes

of each committee could be recorded in the margins.

The committees worked on certain parts separately

And the drafts produced by each committee

were then compared and revised

for harmony with each other.

The result was the King James Authorized Version of 1611.

The Reginald Fuller's work on the Scriptures, he says,

“[In] the doctrine of the incarnation,

[t]he eternal Word of the Father became incarnate

as a first-century Jew, with all his limitations.

It is also analogous to the sacraments.

God uses the frail elements of water, bread and wine

as the means of communicating the redemptive

presence and action of his Word to us.

It is also analogous to the Church,

which likewise is a very human institution,

constantly in need of reform...

“As the incarnate Word is the sacrament of God,
as the bread and wine are sacraments of Christ's body and blood,
as the Church is the sacrament of God's presence in the world,
so the Bible is the sacrament of God's word,
his offer of salvation through his eternal Son and Word.

“The Christian Church inherited from Judaism
the belief that its Scriptures were inspired by God.
This was interpreted in different ways.

To some it meant that God guided the pens
of the human writers or dictated his words
to their minds.

More indirectly, it was held to mean that God
was the ultimate, not the immediate,
cause behind the writing of Scripture...

“A sacramental understanding of the Bible
as the word of God would seem to require a doctrine of inspiration,
not in the sense that the human words came directly
from God and are therefore inerrant,

but in the sense that the human words

proclaim the Christ event with the power to evoke faith.

To produce faith is precisely

the work of the Holy Spirit...

“The inspiration of Scripture is not to be understood

as a once-for-all accomplished event.

When Scripture is read in the church,

the Holy Spirit uses it ever anew

to proclaim the living word of salvation.

This proclamation requires the response of faith,

and that too is the work of the Holy Spirit.”

We believe that there are three forms of the Word of God.

First is the Word of God in the Scriptures.

Second, the Word of God in the Word himself, Jesus Christ,

and third, in the Word proclaimed in the church and in the world.

Preaching is one form of proclamation.

As good Episcopalians we listen to the Word read

each Sunday in four parts:

an Old Testament reading, a Psalm,
a reading from the Epistles or Acts,
and then the Gospel account.

We have to take a little pride in that year in and year out
we, along with our Lutheran brothers and sisters,
hear more of the Bible read in church
than any other denomination.

The problem is that we Episcopalians

are among the most Biblically illiterate Christians.

All too often, people hear sermons based on a reading
that comes as a foreign word.

We haven't done a very good job of helping

our young people

and those who are a little older

understand the “warp and woof” of the Bible.

I want to tell you about my personal journey with the Bible.

I grew up on the western edge of the Bible Belt in Central Texas.

The exact edge is Brownwood, Texas,

over a hundred miles west in of my hometown, Waco.

I grew up in the First United Methodist Church in Waco.

There I was introduced to a heavy slug

of Bible work in Sunday School.

During my senior year in high school,

I decided to branch out a bit.

I have always loved the mystery of Holy Communion,

so I began going to the 8AM service

at St. Paul's Episcopal in Waco.

One of my proudest possessions is this Bible

which was given to me by my father for Christmas in 1957.

Just seven months later, I matriculated at Baylor University,

a serious Baptist college,

with required courses in the Bible.

While at Baylor through the Methodist Wesley Foundation

and the Episcopal Canterbury Club,

I became a dedicated disciple of Christ.

I completed Baylor and Air Force ROTC

and began my Air Force career.

I always was involved as a Sunday School teacher
in churches or in the Base Chapels.

While in Norfolk Virginia, I volunteered
to teach an adult Sunday School Bible class
and did that make a difference in me!

I was transferred to the Washington DC area
and began an adult class there
and got involved in Walk Thru the Bible Seminars
and continued with an involvement
with Episcopal Charismatic Ministries.

Walk Thru the Bible is a pretty conservative approach to Bible study,
but it also involves a clever way
to learn about the books of the Bible.

I went to about four of their seminars.

And I took on a challenge to read through the Bible in a year.

(I have to say that we were to have done
that in my classes at Baylor, but...)

Well, I knew this would be a challenge, and it was.

It required more concentrated discipline than I ever thought.

And it had more rewards than I ever thought.

I picked the Good News Version to read.

That was a smart choice.

I needed something easy.

The Good News Bible is pitched at the fourth grade.

A year later I could say, I did it!

I let a couple of years pass and tried it again.

This time I used The New English Bible. I did it again.

After I left the DC area and my class,

I am happy to say it was still booming

and I was replaced by a Rear Admiral as the teacher.

Then about five years later in California,

I tried the Revised Standard Version. I did it again.

By this time I was teaching my regular adult Bible class

and was offering courses in beginning Bible to my church.

I am proud to say that a number of people went through the course.

The prerequisite was that the students must never
have been in a Bible study class.

Then the surprise of my life came when I was called to ordination.

I began seminary at the Pacific School of Religion
where I had two wonderful teachers,
Jeffrey Kwon and May Ann Tolbert.

Jeffrey is one of the world renowned translators of the book of Job
and Mary Ann is one of the world's experts
on the Gospel according to Mark.

Jeffrey is now President of Claremont School of Theology.

Since I became a Priest, I have not had a chance to teach Bible.

It really ironic. As a lay person, I taught all the time. Now I don't.

We Anglicans are people of the book.

Aside from that little thing with Henry VIII,
we are in the tradition that created the Book
as the standard for all Christianity.

Our Pope is the Book.

That's kind of an odd way to say it,

but it is the first leg of the three-legged stool

which Anglicans revere as our way

of making Via Media, the Middle Way, work

- Scriptures, Tradition and Reason.

I was changed as a person through reading and studying the Bible.

Christians throughout all of our history have been changed.

Our religion was changed by the Book.

I invite you into a year of discipline

and pleasure in reading our Holy Book.

It is incredibly rewarding, enlightening

and you might just find that you are changed by it.

Start easy. Start with a Children's edition even.

But stick with it.

Read everyday, except Sunday.

If you fall behind, don't try to catch up, just keep at it.

So you don't finish in a year and it takes 18 months. Just do it.

I guarantee you will learn;

you'll have accomplished something few have done

and you'll never regret it.

You will have developed some reading muscles
that you didn't know you had.