

**Sermon for Sunday 24 October 2021 – Bible
Sunday – Isaiah 55: 1 – 11; 2 Timothy 3: 14 – 4:
5; John 5: 36b – 47 – Bible Sunday**

Simon and I have several email accounts, but one of them we share. We use the shared one for home and family stuff – so it's not the email account that any of you will know! Just before last Christmas I spent a bit of time researching men's shirts on the internet for Simon's Christmas present. And then of course lots of adverts started to pop up on our shared email account. I had to quickly delete them before Simon noticed! There's one of the disadvantages of having a shared email account!

That's just one small example of how, on the internet, the algorithms work to feed us things that we seem to be interested in. You may have heard the discussion on the news recently about Facebook – and how they have been criticised for the way that vulnerable people are fed harmful information and stories – leading to radicalisation, addiction or even suicide. There's a debate going on as to whether social media

organisations need more regulation, or whether they are able to police themselves. And, of course, we've all heard of fake news.

There are many places that want to feed us what they think we want to hear; rather than what is truthful or helpful or good.

Today is Bible Sunday, and so we're thinking about the Bible, and about how it might speak to us, help and encourage us in a world where truth seems so often to be relative or personal. Or even unimportant. People sometimes even speak about 'my truth' rather than 'the truth' these days.

The Bible is an amazing, fascinating and complicated book – or rather a series of books, written over some 1300 years between roughly 1200 BC and the end of the first century AD. It's full of stories of human lives of all sorts and of God's engagement with the world and with human beings. Supremely it tells us about Jesus, our Lord, and God's plan, through Jesus, to save us from ourselves.

Each of today's three readings has something particular and important to say to us about God's word, the Bible.

"Ho, come to the waters" says the prophet in Isaiah. "Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?" This is an invitation to life, and abundant life. The prophet calls his people to return to God and to follow His ways. Because only in God will they find true satisfaction. God's word, he says, will not return empty, but will accomplish what God intends. God's word is powerful. Remember in the story of Creation, in the first book of the Bible, we have God said, repeated through the story. God just speaks -and the universe and everything in it comes into being.

So, firstly, God's word, or Gods words – are powerful and life-giving. God's word makes things happen.

Our second reading was written, not by a prophet, but by the apostle Paul, to Timothy, his

younger colleague and friend. Paul has been a father-figure to Timothy. Timothy, like Paul, is an evangelist and leader in the young church. And Paul writes to encourage him to persevere with his ministry despite setbacks and difficulties. He says this, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." Timothy is to proclaim the message and to teach "sound doctrine" in an age which sounds very similar to our own. An age when people have "itching ears" and will accumulate teachers who suit their own desires. An age when people turn away from truth to myths. Does that sound familiar?

So, secondly, the Bible is meant to be used for teaching the truth about God and the world, and for training God's people to lead righteous lives in a world where people will believe what they want to hear rather than what is true.

In our third reading, from the Gospel of John, Jesus is in the middle of an argument with some people who don't believe in Him and don't accept that He has been sent by God the Father. He accuses them of studying the scriptures to find eternal life, but not seeing that the Scriptures point to Himself, Jesus, who is the one who gives eternal life. In the time of Jesus, the scriptures were what we call the Old Testament. How much more, now that we have the New Testament - is this the case. The Bible points us to Jesus, God's word made flesh.

So – God's word is powerful and life-giving. It makes things happen and changes people. The Bible is useful for teaching about God and the world and for training us in our Christian lives. Most importantly of all, the Bible points us to Jesus. When we read it He comes alive off the pages with all His strangeness, His compassion, His power and His glory as we read about his life and we hear the stories he told.

What a resource for us in these strange times when so much seems to change and so fast.

When we're not sure who we can trust or what is true. I commend it to you. Read it; meditate on it; study it – alone or in groups. We have two study groups now – on Thursday evening on Zoom, or on Tuesday evening in the vicarage; and the Tuesday fellowship will be up and running again soon. Or if you want to read on your own I can suggest various books and guides.

I know I'm a vicar, but my own Bible – this one I've had since around 2011 – is falling to bits. The cover has fallen off but the words are still good. Let's see if we can all wear out our Bibles – because then we shall be feeding our faith.

Amen