

Thought for the Week

Thought for the Week is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Wednesday 7 October

2 Timothy 3.12-end

William Tyndale

Yesterday the Church remembered William Tyndale, translator of the Scriptures. He was a Gloucestershire boy, and my last parish in Thornbury was close to the Tyndale monument in the Cotswold hills. As I'm sure you know, Tyndale was put to death as a heretic because of his work in translating Scripture into English. If you're a Wolf Hall fan, you might remember mention of Tyndale on the Continent and secret messages passing to and from him and Thomas Cromwell. This was in 1536, the beginning of the Reformation in England and it was controversial to say the least to translate Scripture into the vernacular. However when the first authorised English Bible was released – the 1662 version is still known as the Authorised version – ironically it was based largely on Tyndale's work. I trust that in the communion of saints Tyndale would have been able to rejoice in this without any sense of, well, sour grapes.

The letter to Timothy includes the famous verse reminding us that 'all scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching', etc. Of course when this was written the NT was not yet in existence so the writer was referring to whatever Hebrew Scriptures were known to them. We are not entirely sure which these were; the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures may not have been finalised until around AD 100, although opinion varies about this. Certain texts were controversial, such as Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. Even today, different denominations have differing attitudes to the books included in the Apocrypha. This means that 'All Scripture' is difficult to interpret in the sense of what the writer originally meant. Today it is generally understood by Christians to refer to the whole Bible by extension, as we do believe that the NT books were also inspired by God. In fact the NT teaching about the HS gives us a better understanding of this; John 14.26 promises that the HS would teach us everything and remind us of Jesus' teachings. The process of inspiration and the collaboration between the divine and the human in the writing of Scripture remains a mystery, however. Suffice it to say that there is no point in Scripture where God is seen to override a person's autonomy, so we should not imagine a process of dictation or of divine control of what was written. There is always a human element, and this is consonant with the way God works with us. The way God takes our mistakes and redeems them, works through those situations. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, their second child became the great King Solomon, the most powerful and the wisest of Israelite kings. The way God was incarnate of a human mother, lived and indeed died as we do, and yet expressed divinity through that human person. The way God took Paul, zealous persecutor of Christians, and transformed him into an even more zealous missionary of the gospel.

Tyndale was determined that any plough boy should be able to read scripture for himself and not have to depend on others for his understanding of God. That blessing we all have

and the Bible Societies who still pursue the work of translation, seek to extend it to all human communities with their myriad languages. Apparently there are still 1.5 billion people who have yet to know a Bible in their mother tongue. There are 400 translation projects under way right now. This is surely still the work of the HS, the one who gave the gift of tongues at Pentecost, so that people from all nations could hear and understand the message of the apostles in their own language. Tyndale must still be rejoicing!

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.