



October 2019

Bibletown

Today we begin our journey of learning at Bibletown. Learning usually involves reading but the Bible can seem a bit daunting. It is an ancient library of 66 books, written by 40 or so authors, over roughly 1500 years on 3 continents, containing poems, letters and stories. The Bible is vast and diverse because the people who wrote it had lots and lots of material to choose from. Much of the content began as oral traditions, handed down throughout generations until they were collected and edited, a long time later. There were many years of people sitting around fires or walking hot dusty roads or gathering together in tents, homes and courtyards to tell, to hear, to discuss, debate, adapt and change these stories, poems, letter and accounts. Years later, after meetings with more discussion and debate, decisions were made as to what to include and what to leave out of the Bible we have now. These decision makers were real people, living in real places in real times who chose to include stuff about loss and anger and transcendence and worry and empire and money and fear and stress and joy and doubt and grace and healing...stuff we still talk about, because it is a book about what it means to be human. And that's me and that's you.

But it is not like other stuff I read - and I am a reader - and I admit, it is a daunting book. For a start - where do you begin? I was always told to begin with the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John....the first 4 books in The New Testament section. These tell us about Jesus. The thing to remember about Jesus is, he was Jewish. This may seem obvious (or not) but his culture, his world view would be different from ours as 21st century mostly middle-class folk living in Surrey. I am only really grasping what this Jewishness means now but it has enriched my reading of these stories...they seem so much less sweet or silly or ridiculous. Then there are the Psalms - poems (around the middle section of the Bible) - some are happy and hopeful, some sad and hopeless, some very angry at God, because, let's be honest, this is how we are, as humans.

It may be that you already read the Bible and have your own method of learning from it. If not, there are lots of resources to help. There is 'The Dove Bookshop', part of the Methodist Church in Epsom, which has lots of books and people will help you. There are specific online resources e.g <https://www.brfonline.org.uk/> or <https://www.eden.co.uk/> . I am reading a great book at the moment called "What is the Bible?" by Rob Bell (who is so readable) and that helps make sense of this book. You will see I have used a lot of his ideas in writing this.

I struggle with this Holy Habit - as a habit - because reading the Bible takes time and attention but I know it is well worth it - sometimes you read something and it is like a light has been turned on -it is exhilarating! If you haven't already - give it a try.

Liz