

## 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today is Bible Sunday, when we set aside a day to celebrate God's word. Our first reading today is from 2 Timothy and is oft quoted when emphasising the importance of scripture in our lives as Christians. 2 Timothy is one of Paul's letters, but unlike the majority of his letters, it is written to an individual, rather than to a church, in this case Timothy, Paul's friend and apprentice. Timothy is in Ephesus, and Paul is writing to him from Rome and asking Timothy to travel to Rome to see him, where Paul is in prison. Paul has been abandoned by many of his fellow believers because of his frequent imprisonment. It is a very personal letter. At one point Paul asks Timothy to bring his cloak, books and parchment to him. Paul mentions Timothy's mother and grandmother by name in the first few verses and he refers to Timothy as being like a son to him.

2 Timothy also shows us that the early church was facing many challenges. Paul knows that he is at risk of being executed and so another reason for his letter is to persuade Timothy to persist with the mission of the church. Paul wants Timothy to commit to something bigger than himself, to endure difficulty, and be willing to sacrifice in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

The particular verses in our reading today come from a section of the letter where Paul is encouraging Timothy to confront the corrupt teachers in Ephesus. We don't know exactly what these teachers were teaching that was wrong other than it distorted the theology of resurrection. Under their influence, incorrect teaching was spreading like gangrene and leading the church in Ephesus astray. Just before our passage, Paul tells Timothy that he, along with other faithful leaders, are to teach the real good news about Jesus and to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace - and this is where the importance of scripture comes in.

Paul commends Timothy for his knowledge of scripture. He has known the scriptures since childhood, taught them by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. I really like that Paul recognises the importance of Eunice and Lois here, of the example of women of faith in encouraging Timothy to grow in spiritual maturity.

Now maybe you too have been fortunate to have learnt the scriptures since childhood. I wonder are you someone who can easily recall and quote familiar passages? There are some people who seem to be able to quote huge swaths of the bible at the drop of a hat. Or, if you give them a bible quote, they'll be able to tell you exactly where to find it, chapter and verse. Despite having been a Christian all my life, I am not one of those people. The only bible verses and references I can reliably remember are the ones that I learnt as a song in Sunday school. It just isn't how my brain works, even though, you'll be reassured to hear, I do read my bible quote a lot. I am very grateful that I am training for

ordination at time when, if I need to find where a particular verse or story is in the bible, I can look it up on the internet.

Thankfully, Paul is not commending Timothy for his knowledge of scripture as a great feat of memory, but because reading scripture and learning from it is a tool - a tool for training in righteousness. Why? Well Paul tells Timothy that the scriptures can instruct him for salvation through faith in Jesus. When Paul is talking about scripture here, it is before the New Testament has been formulated, so he's talking about the books of Old Testament – the Hebrew scriptures. Because Jesus is the fulfilment of the Hebrew scriptures, he will find Jesus in them, and this will bolster Timothy's faith.

Paul goes onto say that the scriptures are inspired by God. I promise this is the only long Greek word I'm going to use today, but the Greek word Paul uses here is *theopneustos*, which means something like 'God-breathed' and the 'pneu' – where we get the word pneumonia and pneumatic from - can refer to either air or to spirit. God's breath is present in the scriptures - through his Spirit, he has moved the scripture writers to write. When I think about God's breath, I can't help but think about creation and about how in Genesis it says that God breathes life into Adam – God's breath creates new life. Reading scripture is to breathe in God's air, to allow Holy Spirit to work in us and bring us new life.

So, reading the bible is important because it will help us know the truth of salvation through Jesus, and it will breathe new life into our faith. As Paul tells Timothy, it can also keep us from turning away from the truth and can help us to pursue righteousness.

However, this pursuit of righteousness isn't just for our own sakes it is so that we are equipped. As with so many aspects of our faith, reading the bible is about more than our own selves, our own individual spiritual journeys – it is so that we are prepared to do God's work, to do our part to bring God's Kingdom in the here and now. We breathe in God's spirit as we read His scripture, so that we can breathe out into God's world. For Timothy, this is so that he can be a good leader, teacher and evangelist. When Paul tells him to proclaim the message, he is telling Timothy that reading the scripture will enable him to do what he has been called by God to do, which is preach salvation through Jesus Christ.

But proclaiming the message is not just about preaching or teaching. We are all called to be disciples and so we are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes scripture is useful, 'so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work'. Every good work, not just teaching and preaching – however we are called, whether that's as a persistent prayer, an encourager of others, showing Christ to our families like Lois and Eunice, or if, like Paul, you are patiently enduring a time of difficulty or suffering. We are all called to show others the good news of Jesus that we find in scripture, through our own gifts as well as how we live our lives.

So, as I conclude on this Bible Sunday, let's remember that image of God breathing into us through his scripture, bringing us new life and helping us to grow in righteousness. And let it inspire us to take seriously Paul's call to learn the sacred scriptures, setting

time aside to read the bible. There are many resources and bible notes available to help us to do that, and if reading isn't your thing then I recommend the audio version by David Suchet. But let's also remember, why we read the Bible, why we breathe in God's air- that we can also breathe out, that we might bring the good news of Jesus to those around us, equipped by God to do good works.

Lord, we thank you for the Bible, for your word through which, by the power of your Holy Spirit, we learn more about you, and about the Word, your Son Jesus Christ. Whether we read your word silently or aloud, together or in private, help us to share the good news we find in its pages with others through the worship of our lives. Amen.