

Bread in the Desert. The Word of God

Rev Tom Cadman

A sermon given at Milford Baptist Church Auckland on a day when we celebrate the Church's support for a mobile Bible school in Bangladesh, the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible and the season of Lent.

Matthew 4:1-11

What does the wilderness desert, tucked in between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, have in common with the river plains of Bangladesh and the 17th century court of King James 1st of England? Is there a common link that binds them together? If there it's that collection of books we call the Scriptures or the Bible.

Alone in the desert, bombarded with the powerful and persuasive enticements of the Tempter, Jesus reminds his adversary that though meeting physical human needs is important, that is not sufficient on its own. Who can doubt that in the wake of the tumultuous natural disasters of the past months vital and life giving physical resources are essential for living? But life also needs a deeper and lasting sustenance- "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Without those words even the most materially satisfied life has no ultimate purpose or direction.

In the congested delta of a relatively new nation it's easy to imagine that provision of rice and the other staples of life, guaranteed international markets, statehood and the right to pursue their own particular religious and political choices is all that Bangladesh needs. But the Church in Bangladesh has heard that word of Jesus that their nation cannot live by bread alone. Their country needs every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So the Church is setting up a mobile Bible School to furnish and equip pastors and people with that word in their own language.

And the 17th century court of King James 1st ... where does this fit in to the picture? At the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 the King, probably to console the Puritans, casually offered to commission a new bible translation in the language of the common people. It was the culmination of a growing wave of demand for the Bible -the words of God- to be made available to the common people in their own language. The Bible had already been translated by previous generations- Luther in German, Wycliffe, Tyndale and others into English. James's decision resulted in a translation that came to fruition in 1611 and helped fashion the faith and language of English speaking peoples for four centuries.

In May 2011, everywhere English is spoken, the Church celebrates the 400th anniversary of the King James Version or Authorised Version of the Bible and declares its conviction that "we do not live by bread alone."

To-day we come to the end of our desert sojourn with Jesus, we prepare to give generously to the support of the Mobile Bible school of Bangladesh and we remember with gratitude, the labours of those 17th century translators and their successors who laid the basis of every modern English version of God's Word we possess.

If we cannot live by bread alone, what is it about *God's word* that makes it the Christians source of spiritual sustenance?

I have in front of me four Bibles. Three are copies of the King James or Authorised version. The fourth is "Good news for Modern Man: a version first published in the mid twentieth century. Each has a story to tell.

The first is my birth mother's Bible

My birth sister gave it to me. My birth mother came from Cahir in Ireland. A young and devout Roman Catholic girl she emigrated to NZ at sixteen years of age, to work as a servant girl. She married a NZ ships engineer and gave birth to six children of whom I was the last. She died two days after my birth. My devastated father and Grandmother, struggling to see how they would cope in the difficult situation prevailing at the tail end of the depression reluctantly allowed me to be fostered and then adopted by a Baptist family.

The flyleaf of this Bible reminds me that I spring from Irish Catholic stock. If life had been different, I would have been raised in a Catholic family with five older siblings. That's my birth heritage. But when I move from the flyleaf to the opening pages of my birth mothers Bible I hear the words of *God* telling me that I am made in the image of *God*, that like all other human beings I am product of *God's* creative handiwork. I am not a random collection of molecules and atoms. I am made a little lower than the angels and bear in my being the hallmarks of the Divine Creator.

Here The Bible speaks *God's* creative word telling me I am a unique product of *God's* action in bringing the world, humanity and me into being.

The next is my adopted mothers Bible.

The flyleaf bears the name of my adoptive mother. It reminds me I was taken in and loved at a very vulnerable time in life. I was raised in the context of a devout Baptist family who kept me in the family of *God* until I made my own personal decision hear *God's* word for myself and become a member of the Household of Faith.

Both my birth family and my adopted family played a vital part in this process.

I first heard from my oldest birth sister when I was nearly forty years of age. She told me how, only a short time after we first established contact, she was talking to the Mother Superior of the Convent School she attended at the time I was adopted out. The Mother Superior asked, "Did she know what had happened to little Tommy?" My sister told her, how after all those years, she had recently established contact and that I was a Baptist Minister. The Mother Superior's reply is one of those special reminders of *God's* gracious love where the influence of my adopted family and my birth family joined hands.

"Ever since Tommy left your home," the Mother Superior told my sister, "I've never ceased to pray for him that he would end up a fine Christian man."

As I read on in my adopted mother's Bible I hear **God's recreating word**. calling me to see in God's love and grace the invitation to become a child of God, an heir of the Kingdom, a member of the family of God. It is the words of God telling me I can be changed, I can discover forgiveness and mercy, and I can be filled with the knowledge that earth is not my home, that I am a pilgrim on a journey to the Promised Land.

In my birth mothers Bible I hear **Gods creative words**.

In my adopted mothers Bible I hear God's gracious **re-creating words**

The third Bible is a Thompson's Chain Reference Bible

Again it is the Authorised or King James Version.

The flyleaf reads:

"Presented to Mr Tom Cadman from the members of the Opawa Baptist Church on the occasion of his entry into the Baptist College, Auckland. March 1954."

Here is **God's commanding word**. Every Christian is called and commanded by God. Whatever the calling or vocation in life we follow we are called to be servants, people of obedience, those who not only soak up God's grace but listen for God's commanding word, "This is the way, walk in it."

Sometimes that word calls us out of our comfort zone, it calls us away from the things and people we cherish and hold dear. God's commanding word challenges us to withstand the temptation to go with the crowd, save our own skin at all costs, to refuse to yield to persuasive voices that tell us truth and conscience are pieces of malleable clay we can squeeze into whatever shape suits us.

This Bible reminds me I made a promise, I heard a command, I responded to a call and that my life's purpose and significance are wrapped up in obedience to that commanding word.

Last but not least is "The Good news Bible."

The flyleaf reads:

"Presented to the Rev T.W. Cadman, Minister Central Baptist Church Wellington by the NZ Bible Society."

It's signed by the General Secretary and inscribed and hand illustrated by Annie Valleton whose drawings adorn many pages of the translation.

Here is God's contemporary Word.

This is not the ancient translation of the King James Authorised version. It's a modern free rendering of the Scripture, God's words in the contemporary 20th century language.

Now those words are available in a huge variety of technical forms. Hosts of different versions sit side by side on the Internet and every word that proceeds from the mouth of God comes freshly translated into contemporary languages and idioms.

People read the Bible in Church from their Iphones and I pads. Niche Bibles proliferate; The Couples Bible, One year NT for busy Mums, Extreme Teens study Bible and would you believe, The Light Speed Bible. Read every word in about 24 hours "or a little longer" You see the connection now? The desert experience and wisdom of Jesus leaps centuries finding foothold in, the Royal court of King James 1st, in the villages and cities of Bangladesh, the urban jungles of Western civilisation, in luxury hotels and motels, in prisons and in subsistence villages of the third world. It finds its way into the hearts and homes of people, who know they cannot live by bread alone and long to hear the words of God, Some years ago I heard the German Christian leader, Martin Niemoller, speak at an ecumenical gathering in the city where I lived.

Niemoller, a former U Boat commander and a supporter of Hitler and the Nazi regime was one of the founding Pastors of the Lutheran "Confessing Church." Alarmed at the Nazi pressure on the Church to conform to their political policies, Bonhoeffer joined in opposing Hitler and the Nazi party. He refused to obey the command of Hitler for the Church to conform and in a classic encounter told the German Dictator, "God, Herr Hitler, not you is My Fuehrer"

He was taken into custody and sent to concentration camps where he spent eight years. He recalled those first hours of his internment. "They stripped me of my clothes and possession. They stripped me of my name and gave me a number. Everything I valued was stripped from me. I asked them to leave me only two things. One was my wedding ring, the sign of the covenant of love my wife and I shared with our family. The other was my New Testament, God's words of covenant love with me and his promises on which my faith was built.'

So we leave the desert now with the words of Jesus ringing in our ears. "You cannot live by bread alone. You need every word that God speaks." Neither the Church nor our world can live by bread alone vital as that bread is. We need the words of God to tell us who we are, and that we are loved, forgiven and called to a life of obedience to Jesus Christ in our contemporary world.