



CURATE'S CURIOSITIES – October 2016

My family and I have just had a week's holiday, spending some time visiting my aunt in Wimborne Minster in Dorset. While there we visited the minster itself, which had a chained library, dating from the 17th century. One of the books on display was a 'polyglot Bible'. Produced in the mid-seventeenth century, this multi-volume Bible had the Biblical text in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Syriac and so on, all arranged in columns on the same pages, so that comparisons could be made. This was cutting edge technology (the printers had to make Hebrew and Arabic printing blocks) and enabled Biblical scholars to interpret the text more faithfully.

That evening, my aunt said how difficult it was for her to understand what the Bible was saying. She felt that the gospel stories were hard to understand without interpretation, and as for the Old Testament, much of this was impenetrable. In a way, she needed something like that polyglot Bible, to translate the Bible into an urbanized, technological, post-modern, secular world. Talking with her was a great reminder to me that clergy need not only to interpret the Bible when we preach, but also to equip you to make sense of the word on your own.

Five hundred years ago the Reformation kicked off a fight that (in part) was about taking the Bible out of the hands of priests and putting it in the hands of ordinary people, so that they could read for themselves the amazing news at the heart of the gospel we proclaim. It was about taking the interpretative power out of the hands of the priests.

We (the whole ministry team) would love for you to feel able to open the Bible and understand what it is saying. In fact, we were talking about this the other day. There are study bibles (try the Life Application Study Bible) that include maps, timelines, notes, cross-references and side-panel articles to help you orient yourself within the Biblical world. There are books like the Lion Handbook to the Bible, which is still really popular, or, for greater depth still, the Eerdmans Bible Dictionary or New Bible Dictionary are the sort of books that I go to help me. For teens and younger readers, there are graphic novel Bibles too – such as the Lion Comic Book Hero Bible. A lot of these that I've mentioned can be picked up second hand from Abebooks.com or Amazon for not much money.

It can be a really good thing to find a Bible that you get on with and then bring it to church with you each Sunday. Bring a pen too, and you can write comments in the margin, or underline passages that have helped you. Over time, your Bible will become more useful and inspiring, as it reminds you of the struggles, the inspiration and the joy you have had as you get to know Jesus better, through a Bible that you are more confident you understand.