

Dear friends,

As I write this, we are just coming to the end of Bible Month which this year has covered all of Mark's gospel. I hope you have been able to 'fill in the gaps' by reading the various chapters of his book between each Sunday's service. Mark's style of writing has carried us apace, moving from one scene to the next, recounting for us Jesus' ministry, his passion, crucifixion and resurrection.

In his opening verse, Mark tells us that this is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Yet, having made that declaration, he then invites us, along with those who encounter Jesus, to decide for ourselves who Jesus is. Right up to the (original) closing sentences of the final chapter, he leaves the question hanging, confident, I think, that once we have read all that he has written about Jesus we will no longer be in any doubt, but declare, with Peter, that Jesus is the Christ.

It reminds us (were such a reminder necessary!) of the preciousness of God's word. So often we take access to the Bible for granted. All of us, I'm sure, own at least one copy; many of us will have several on our shelves. Yet that is not true for everyone across the world, and I have shared below the story of Mary Jones and her yearning to possess her own Bible, of how her story inspired the formation of the Bible Society.

It is not only the gospel stories about Jesus which make the Bible so precious. The whole of the Bible speaks of the greatest love story ever: the love of God for his creation, for all of humanity – for *us*. Sometimes that is too much for us to take in. We agree that God must indeed love what he has made – but love us? *Each* of us? *You?* *Me?* Who are we in the grand scheme of things we ask ourselves? God might love generally but surely not so specifically. But he does: he loves you .....and he loves me. It is there in his Holy Word.

It seems to me that during these summer months, as we relax in the sunshine and enjoy the lifting of Covid restrictions and a lightening of the anxiety that has been part of our lives for the last 18 months, we would do well to spend time reading it.

As it says in 2 Timothy 3:15-17:

*Since childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and showing people how to live so that the one who serves God may be fully equipped to do every kind of good deed.*

So, friends, I wish you a summer of reading, of soul rest and spiritual restoration. May you take time to be with God, to bask in his presence and find yourselves uplifted by his love.

With every blessing,

Sharon

## **The story of Mary Jones and her Bible**

This is a story that will be very familiar to a lot of you, indeed I believe it has previously appeared in this newsletter.

In 1784 a little girl called Mary Jones was born and lived in a small grey cottage in the shadow of the Cader Idris mountain in mid Wales. Her father died when she was four years old and her mother struggled to provide for the family.

There was no school in the village and no one in Mary's family could read but Mary loved to go to chapel and listen to the stories from the Bible which she would remember and longed to be able to read for herself. Eventually, when she was nine years old, a school opened in a village about six miles away and every day, Mary would walk there and back. She learned to read and a neighbour, Mrs Evans, would let Mary practise on a Saturday afternoon by reading from her Bible. Mary loved doing this and wished very much for a Bible of her own but knew there was no way her mother could afford to buy one.

So Mary worked to earn the money to buy her own Bible. Mrs. Evans gave Mary some chickens and she sold their eggs. She weeded gardens, collected firewood, she washed clothes in the river, knitted socks, and babysat for the neighbours' children. It took her six years but, finally, Mary had saved enough money to buy a Bible.

She had heard of a pastor, a Mr Thomas Charles, who had Bibles for sale in Welsh and English - but he lived in Bala which was 25 miles away! Nevertheless, determined girl that she was, she set off across the Welsh mountains for Bala. It was a long and tiring walk and when she arrived, she was dismayed to discover that Mr Charles only had one Bible left, and it was already promised to someone else. However, he took her in and gave her food and lodging for the night and the next day he gave Mary his last Bible and told her that the other person could wait a little longer. Mary was so excited that she almost ran the 25 miles home, clutching her Bible.

Mary's courage and faith had stirred Thomas Charles and in 1802, at a meeting of The Religious Tracts Society, he proposed that a group be formed to provide Bibles in Welsh. Inspired by the discussion, another minister, Joseph Hughes, cried out: "If for Wales, why not for the kingdom? And if for the kingdom, why not for the world?" The British and Foreign Bible Society was created, now known as the Bible Society which works in over 200 countries and is committed to making the Bible available to all people.