



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

21st April 2023

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Psalm 119:11

When I was a child in Sunday school, Bible class or Church, I learnt Bible verses, scripture-based songs or hymns rich in Christian truth, with singable, memorable tunes. Sometimes it was because I was told to, sometimes through continual repetition. Even in a state school in those far-off days, as well as secular poetry I had to learn 'basics' like the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed for homework!

Whether we are reluctant, willing or accidental learners, things memorised when we are young go in deeply and lastingly. The result is that on many occasions and in many places and situations, a Bible verse or a line of a hymn comes back to mind. And it is surprising (*or is it?!*) how often what comes to mind is exactly what is needed for that moment or situation (Luke 21:15).

I'm reminded of St. Paul's teaching on the armour of God, including *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17). I always reckon that the Christian 'soldier' needs a whole selection of 'swords' from God's word, and that the right one will come to hand when required! It often seems so.

The word 'remember' is one of the most frequent and urgent calls throughout scripture (well over two hundred times), and another frequent exhortation about God's words and memories of his love is, *"teach them to your children"*.

Today we have some potential problems: (a) learning by heart is not so common; (b) worship songs are (if I may say so) often less scriptural, less theologically 'weighty' (which is good in some ways) and less melodiously memorable; and (c) people can have the whole Bible on their smart-phone, so it seems less necessary to learn passages from it. There are exceptions, of course, but it is a concern that emerging generations will not have accumulated the fund of Bible verses, hymns and songs that will be for them *"the sword of the Spirit"* to defend themselves in times of trial and temptation.

Psalm 119 is all about God's word, and perhaps the key to it is verse 11: *"I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you"*. We might substitute: '...that I might know how to defend my faith', or '...that I might be encouraged', or '...that I might see temptation for what it is', or '...that I might be guided when in a dilemma'..... and so on. But if I haven't *"hidden God's word in my heart"* and memory, it may not come to mind when I need it.

Sometimes I wonder how my faith might be sustained if I were deprived of the Bible and other Christian resources. For many people that is the reality of restrictions and persecution. Could I piece together a 'mini Bible' consisting of all the bits I remember? Once in a Bible class we had a 'Shipwreck Sunday', when we came with no Bibles or songbooks to see how much we could share from memory. Maybe it's worth a try!

As you walk with him today, may God bless you with memories!