

**May 2019**

*Rev John writes:*

## ***‘ALL HUMAN LIFE IS HERE...’***



Holy Week and Easter this year has been somewhat affected by modern tragedies of death and hoped for resurrection. The awful fire in Paris that caused devastation to Notre Dame Cathedral, and the climate change protesters of ‘Extinction Rebellion’ in London have been followed, as I write on the eve of Easter Day, by the shooting of a journalist as sectarian violence flares in Londonderry and there is another knife crime death on a beach in the North West of England.

On 1843 John Browne Bell published a new Sunday broadsheet newspaper for 1d. What made his paper different from others was that he recognised that stories featuring crime, sensation and vice was what people wanted to read. So it was that the ‘News of the World’ was born – with its famous strapline - ‘all human life is here’. Sadly it was a story of internal crime and sensation that caused the paper to publish a final edition on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

The Old Testament contains five books which are given the general title of Wisdom literature. These are extremely varied, all human life is there. Pain, pleasure, love, hate, sex, anger, cynical boredom, wild jubilation – all the senses and emotions which fill our days are found in these writings.

**JOB** – is a long meditation on the problem of suffering. Job is a righteous man who suffers unjustly. Much of the book consists of a series of arguments between two opposing points of view as to why Job suffers, at the end of which God appears but doesn’t answer the question. A challenging book which doesn’t so much answer the questions as question the answers!

**PSALMS** – is a collection of 150 poems and songs. Some are joyful, some sad, some desperate, others thankful. They are intensely personal reflections on what it means to have a relationship with

God. Collected over a period of 400 years, these psalms provide a spiritual journal, a record of feelings and circumstances – in short a reflection of how life is.

**PROVERBS** – is a collection of wise and helpful sayings on all aspects of life including work, women and wine. These sayings provide a kind of mini-instruction manual on how to live. Not quite the proverbs our grandmother used to recite – but they still stimulate, provoke us, and get us to think.

**ECCLESIASTES** – is a strange book indeed – a deep and sometimes dark and often cynical meditation on the futility of existence. Glimpses of God occasionally shine through. This is arguably one of the most difficult books in the Bible – it can be uncomfortable in its dismissal of life as meaningless. Yet it recognises that God is supreme – the one reality in an unreal world.

**SONG OF SONGS** – is a love poem which joyfully extols the virtues of sex through the erotic and physical love of a man and a woman. The Song of Solomon is a wonderful celebration of the spontaneity, power and mystery of love. Rarely read in church, yet often chosen as a wedding reading.

In many ways these are the most ‘human’ books of the Bible. They ask difficult questions, provide perplexing answers at times. The mood swings from depression to exultation, from bad things to good, from the ridiculous to the sublime. They are called ‘wisdom’ because the Hebrew word for wisdom is more accurately translated as ‘life skills’. Had there been a local branch of WH Smith or Waterstones in Old Testament times – these writings would have filled the ‘body, mind and spirit’ section.

However, these are not just pragmatic sayings to provide advice to get us through the day. They are focussed on God, on his relationship with humanity and a reminder that all wisdom and knowledge is based on a proper respect for God and his works. As the headlines in our newspapers, T V’s and smart-phones remind us – they are still much needed today.

Yours in Christ,

Reverend John.