



## THE WORD OF LIFE

A Pastoral Letter to the Teulu Asaph from Bishop Gregory  
15<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Today the Church in Wales celebrates Edmwnd Prys, who four hundred years ago, in 1621, published his translation into Welsh of the Book of Psalms. His translations are in a metrical form which can be sung to hymn tunes, so that they were accessible and could be learned by heart by every Welsh speaker in the land. Edmwnd's work came to stand alongside the work of the likes of William Morgan and Richard Parry, both of them bishops of St Asaph, and of William Salesbury, who all, for the love of the people of Wales and their belief in the power of the Scriptures to bring eternal life, laboured to bring the Scriptures into life in their home tongue, so that they could be read and understood by all.

As you can imagine, we're rightly proud of these members of the Teulu Asaph, who achieved such great things by working together. They set a standard for the Welsh language which lasted right into the twentieth century. This month, through the leadership of our excellent Education team – both the diocesan team and the Cathedral team – we've been reaching out to the pupils in our Church Schools, to share a proper sense of excitement at all that the translators achieved. You can even find a celebratory service recorded for our Church schools published on the internet on You Tube: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag7tmWiVtyw>)

Why were they so passionate about translating the scriptures into Welsh? Quite simply, because they believed that an encounter with Scripture brought life – life in all its fullness, eternal life – that the Bible is able to educate the soul, not only in a way of living that brings fullness of life, but also because they introduce us to Jesus and tell the story of salvation. To read the scriptures is to hear how God wants people to live, and to hear the authentic account of the teaching of Jesus. It is an immediate, first hand way to hear the Word of Life.

When the Jewish leaders were making the final decision as to which books would make up the Bible of Judaism, what Christians call the Old Testament, or perhaps better the First Testament, they used an incredibly strange criterion: true Scripture, they said, would "contaminate the hands". It was almost as if holiness could be equated with radioactivity. For the rabbis, it was not possible to handle the Bible without it leaving an imprint on your being. I suspect that the translators thought something similar: that to read the words of Scripture was to open oneself to be touched by the converting power of the Holy Spirit. When we call the Bible "the Word of God", this is what we mean, that the Church has recognised these books as having the imprint of the Holy Spirit, God's personal seal of approval as the authentic record of God's Word to the world in Jesus.

There's a passage in the Gospels where Jesus is abandoned by a large body of disciples, and he turns to the Twelve: Will you also leave me? he asks. It is Peter who replies: "To whom should we go, for you have the words of eternal life." (John 6.68). A letter said to be written by James, the brother of Jesus, compares reading the Scriptures to looking into a mirror and seeing what you really look like. Unless you allow it to change you, he writes, it is like going away and immediately forgetting what you have seen. (James 1.24). This immediate and direct access to the message God wants us to hear is what is vouchsafed to us when we open and read our Bibles attentively and intelligently.

What a gift God has given us in the Bible – for it speaks with the authority of Jesus, as if we had been there among the crowds that heard him speak. And yet, how often do we consult it (as the Prayer Book says: "to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it") this Word that brings Life?

