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Words of Eternal Life

Four hundred years ago this year King James I authorised a new English translation of the Bible. It took seven years for several teams of translators to produce. The version of the Bible that was published in 1611, known today as the King James Bible, has had a huge influence on the language and ideas of the world in which we live.

In 1600 the idea that the Bible should be made available to ordinary people their own language was still a relatively new one. Those who campaigned for it and those who worked on it did so in the conviction that this mattered. The scholarship and literary skill which they brought to their work is proved by the way that it has endured.

However, there are few churches today where you can hear the King James Version read. Most churches have opted for a modern translation of the Hebrew and Greek in which scripture was originally written. Isn't it a shame to see this icon of our English identity discarded so easily?

John's Gospel tells us that on one occasion, after he had spoken some difficult words which caused many to desert him, Jesus asked his disciples whether they too wanted to leave. Peter replied; 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

Jesus' words are often difficult. However, they need to be heard and understood today because they are still words of eternal life. As we celebrate the achievement of those who translated the King James Version our response should be to find a Bible that is written in language that we can understand and read Jesus' words for ourselves.