

## **27<sup>th</sup> October 2019 Bible Sunday**

*Psalm 119; Romans 5: 1-6; Luke 4: 16-24*

Today is Bible Sunday.

An opportunity to focus on Scripture as an expression of the Word of God which, when we allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through its pages, will challenge us, feed us, encourage us, inspire us and change us.

As today's collect said, we seek God's help to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Scriptures so that our lives are shaped by them.

When I first arrived I mentioned Bible reading notes in large print and gave away one or two copies. If there are those who would like to adopt this habit of daily guided Bible reading, whether in book form or online, please do speak to Alison or me and we will ensure that you can access those.

Similarly, if like me you enjoy a seasonal focus of reading, I am just about to order from the Advent book for this year, which has a daily reading form the Bible. I can obtain these for the knock down price of £5 each rather than the usual £8.99 but I need orders by 17<sup>th</sup> November please – just have a look and sign the list at the back of church

This morning we will focus on the gospel reading. Since last December we have been reading the gospel of Luke- year C. But today we turn back to chapter 4 and the start of Jesus' public ministry, the 3 years he spent as a travelling teacher, preacher and healer, sharing the good news of God's kingdom.

Chapter 3 baptism....

Chapter 4 into the wilderness, temptations.

And then: <sup>14</sup> *Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.* <sup>15</sup> *He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.*

Come with me to Nazareth...

There's a buzz in the air and everyone is talking about him.

Not many empty seats in synagogue today, because they've all heard the rumour that he's back.

The women's section upstairs is filling up too and Mary is in danger of not being able to see him for herself, she's so surrounded by neighbours wanting to know if it's true.

Has he really been teaching up and down the hill country in all the villages?

Where did he learn all that? No disrespect to Joseph of course, he was always good with his hands, but he never had much time for head knowledge, he left that to the scribes and Pharisees.

Mary, have you seen him?

Surely he's let you know what he's been up to?

Is he staying with you back at home?

Did I see you setting an extra place for the Sabbath meal this week?

Mary, as usual, smiles and says nothing.

She's barely seen Jesus since he took off to the Jordan, in search of his cousin John, nearly two months ago, bidding her farewell with three simple words: 'It's time, mother.'

The synagogue is full now, and suddenly a hush falls, and in he walks. She watches him take his seat, near his brothers, sees heads turn in recognition, notices the attendant nod toward him.

Some moments later he stands and walks to the front to read. From the prophet Isaiah, words of hope and promise, the words of the Messiah, God's messenger.

And as he reads, a hush falls, because he reads it not only with his lips but with his heart, and what she hears is not her boy, but God's voice.

It's no longer Isaiah foretelling the Messiah, but the Messiah himself speaking, in the synagogue in Nazareth, to anyone who has ears to hear.

The reading hangs in the air as he returns to his seat.

Everyone looks at Jesus.

'Eventually he breaks the silence. 'Today, he says, this scripture has been fulfilled, in your hearing'.

What a morning service that must have been!

The word of God, spoken by the Son of God, right there in Nazareth, not in the capital city, not in a cathedral, but right there, at home, amidst the ordinary everyday life and worship of his home town.

But that is precisely where and how God speaks.

Amidst the ordinary and everyday circumstances of our lives.

At 10.15 am on a Sunday morning in Brancepeth

He speaks to all who are listening, all who want to hear.

We don't need to go somewhere special to hear him, but we do need to be listening.

As we do so we will come to recognise God' voice.

At our 'Setting Sail' morning a few weeks ago we read Jonah chapter 4. We read and we listened for God's voice through his word. Then we shared what we had heard and more than a few people heard God through that passage- we have captured those thoughts and ideas as we continue on our discernment of his priorities for us. And in church every week, how wonderful to have our readings sheets to take home- please do! People say to me as they leave, that they've heard God on ordinary Sunday mornings.

Not always in so many words, but with phrases like 'That psalm was for me today', or 'I'd never understood that verse before but today it just jumped out at me'.

In Shotton we began a new the Bible study group.... Which was described by one member as the best evening out which they really enjoyed; as another member of the group I can say I really enjoyed it too!

I wonder, is there a hunger for that here too?

We discover that the Bible is relevant, moving, inspiring, contemporary, and that even parts we have read many times before can impact us afresh as we ask God to speak to us.

The more we read God's word and listen for his voice,  
the more we will hear him, not surprisingly.

Back to Nazareth

At first, after his powerful reading of Isaiah's prophecy, everyone praises Jesus, basks in reflected glory for a while- *of course I knew him when he was just a toddler;*

*I remember him playing with my son when they were boys; we always went to Joseph if we needed anything made or repaired, such a good carpenter, and Jesus was a chip off the old block if you'll excuse the pun...*

Jesus? The carpenter's son? What right has he to be speaking like this? We know where he's come from, we do. We remember the rumours when Mary got herself pregnant... and now he waltzes back in and starts claiming to be the Messiah- who does he think he is??

And as if he can hear their thoughts Jesus says,

You want me to do miracles for you, don't you. To prove God's word to you, or you will not believe. That's how it is:

Not prophet is accepted in his home town.'

And as he continues speaking, calmly and clearly,  
the mood changes.

Changes from adoration to anger, respect to rage.

He is jostled out of the synagogue, out of town, to the brow of the hill, the  
angry mob calling for blood.

But he keeps on walking, out of Nazareth, on his way.

I wonder how Mary felt? No chance to even speak to him, no time to embrace and  
welcome him home... but an angry crowd rejecting him for speaking the truth.  
Was this, she wondered, how it was going to be?

And it still happens today, in a less obvious, unseen way.

He is still pushed out of services, ignored and rejected when his word is just too  
close to home or too uncomfortable to hear,

We too have a choice every time we hear or read God's word of truth- to accept or  
reject it, to pay attention to him or to push him away. We can easily drown out his  
voice, block our ears, but he won't give up. Have you ever had the feeling that God  
is speaking to you and simply won't give up until you stop and listen?

Today's gospel reading reminds us of the Good News which Jesus came to bring-  
good news to the poor, poor in spirit and humble of heart. It's good news of release,  
recovery and freedom, both external and internal.

This good news brings life and hope for all who will hear and it is good news which  
we, having heard and responded ourselves, are called to share with our family ,  
friends and neighbours, with the people we see every day as we go about our  
ordinary lives.

But there is a huge challenge here too. The people of Nazareth thought they knew  
Jesus, the carpenter's son, and they were unable to see beyond, even when Isaiah's  
prophecy was fulfilled right in front of their eyes.

We may have heard the familiar words of services and Bible readings for many years, may sit in the same pew week by week and not expect to hear God speak. Perhaps we are disappointed and a bit disillusioned by the church and how caught up it can become in things that don't really matter.

I am convinced that how we read, mark learn and inwardly digest the Bible is crucial to our growth as a church and as individuals.

So may God wake us out of our stupor and speak to us with power and grace. May he give us expectant hearts, so that we listen intently to his guidance and have faith that he will lead us forward , provide for our needs, breathe new life into this church and every one of us.

Amen.