



Sunday, 27 October 2019 – Bible Sunday
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Romans 15: 1-6 & the Gospel St Luke 4: 16-24
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

An old friend

The Bible has possibly been a constant feature in our lives since childhood. When we go home, we might be surprised at how many we have on selves, in cupboards and perhaps you own a family Bible that's been handed down from one generation to generation. And what about the different versions? The KJV, the RSV, the NRSV: the list is almost as endless as the various views about which version is the best!

Is reading understanding?

Here's my first, very own Bible. It's a bit battered now but this Bible together with Scripture Union notes helped me to form a first-hand relationship with God. My favourite Gospel at that time was Luke because he explained things in such detail that I could imagine the scene. Also, being a Gentile, he was writing for Gentiles like you and me. The drawback for we Gentiles, is that we do not necessarily pick up on the levers within the text that Jesus quotes from the Old Testament, as would be understood automatically by Jews schooled in Scripture, so we may miss just how radical Jesus' ministry was, as today's Gospel shows.

Going back to the future

I said in my welcome to this service that today marks a Rubicon moment when we turn from focusing on Jesus' active ministry and mission and begin to retrace the path that led to it. In the Gospel, Jesus retraces his steps to the synagogue of his childhood. He is handed the scroll of Isaiah and reads from what we know today as chapter 61. We heard that all eyes were fixed on Jesus as he claimed to be the manifestation of the scriptures that he has just read, which was to be God's anointed agent, to undertake his redemptive transformative commission, which would deliver distinct blessings:

1st To bring the 'good news' to the poor. Good news it's what 'Gospel' means and here is Jesus claiming to be its fulfilment.

2nd To proclaim encouragement and hope for captives and, in our society today, we have many whether captives of addictions, ill-health, economics, politics or oppressive religion regimes: that all may be set free from oppression.

3rd To proclaim the 'Year of the Lord's favour': the promise of a gracious restoration of the covenant God made with his people.

There's none so blind as them that won't see

No wonder astonished eyes were all fixed on Jesus. At first, people speak well of him for his proclamation had the ring of authority and conviction, however, next they say but he's only Joseph's Son: we grew up with him! Jesus reads their minds – "the man's ill: Doctor, you need to take a tablet! Heal yourself" For the Jews, God's agent of whom Isaiah prophesied,

was expected to be someone outstanding, in short, the Messiah. Truly, Jesus mused, no one whose prophecies to those of his own background is ever accepted. No wonder the downtrodden of society were more ready to hear the Gospel good news, for they were used to prejudice, they could not rely on their own resources for they had no reserves. Paul echoes this in his Letter to the Romans, when he quotes Christ "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." All needed a champion to give them hope. Paul urges harmony among the Christians citing scripture as the ultimate source of hope and encouragement, which is manifest in Christ Jesus. When together, we speak with one voice we glorify God the Father, who sent his son to save us. All good stuff: this is the faith we have received. The Bible is a constant, comforting presence but, here's a challenge for all of us: how often do we pray for the Holy Spirit's discernment that the Bible will speak to us so that we may act accordingly? Do we need to read it from a fresh perspective?

Seeing from a fresh perspective

Here's an illustration of what I meant earlier about intuitive Jewish insight. I recently read a biography of a Jewess who attended a Church of England foundation school. At about the same age as I received my Bible, she started to read the New Testament, which came as a total revelation to her. Little by little, she began to realise that Jesus Christ not only made sense of Jewish Scripture but that he is the fulfilment of it. First, she suffered prejudice as a Jew amongst Christians and then, when she became a Christian, she suffered prejudice from her own Jewish family. Yet, she became convinced that the Bible points to the Way, the truth and the Life being in Jesus and so, in faith, she turned to Christ.

Food for thought

The Bible is like our need for daily food. If we leave it on the plate it might look inviting but unless we eat it, it won't nurture us. It is the same with the Bible, searching the scriptures feeds our faith only with daily application. Or, as today's Collect puts it so well:

'Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, help us to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, for the hope of everlasting life. Amen.'