

Sunday 26 October – Bible Sunday

Sermon by Christine Newmarch

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)

Today is Bible Sunday. Of course, you could say that every Sunday is a Bible Sunday or even that every day is a Bible Day. While that is true, because all scripture is intended for our learning; it is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. However, this is only meaningful if one has access to it.

Bible Sunday in its modern form dates back to 1804, to encourage the wider circulation and use of the scriptures, and for the Bible to be made available in as many languages as possible.

We are blessed to have unrestricted access to the Bible in traditional and modern wording, so I thought we could have a little quiz this morning to test our biblical knowledge. Don't worry, it will not be too tricky, it's multiple choice too. There's no writing, for a little friendly competition, it's the north aisle v the south aisle.

[Ask for the screen to come down, if not already down; thank you]

[Run quiz]

Well, that was just a bit of fun, and if it has inspired you to look again at parts of the bible which you haven't read for a while, that's great.

In this morning's gospel reading, we hear how Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath. Though this may be a very familiar passage, it bears close re-reading.

It led me to wonder why Jesus stood up to read, and about 1st century synagogue practices. My reading indicated that information is very limited. There would have been local variation in synagogue worship before the 2nd century. Nonetheless, we can learn quite a lot.

A reading from the Torah, the first five chapters of our Old Testament, would have been central to the service everywhere. This dated back to instructions from Moses and is reflected in the outdoor reading recorded in Nehemiah after the return from the Babylonian exile.

Including a second reading from the prophets is thought to date from the 1st century, around Jesus' time.

It is not clear why Jesus stood up to read from the scriptures. Did he volunteer, or was he called upon to do so? In Acts 13 Paul and his companions were invited to address the gathering because they were honoured visitors. Accordingly, it could be that Jesus was offered the privilege of reading in recognition of having returned home after 40 days in the wilderness. Of course, we cannot be certain.

Luke tells us that Jesus 'found the place' which he read in the scroll. Some scholars think this indicates there was a fixed reading schedule in the 1st century and, if so, maybe the place had already been marked for Jesus. It is equally possible that Jesus selected the place for himself. Again, we do not know, nor can we be sure of the language on the scroll. Was some form of Hebrew still a living language, or possibly Greek? Again, this is uncertain, but we can be sure that Jesus' listeners clearly understood, especially when Jesus began explaining the text:

'Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Initially, 'All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.'

So far, so good, even when the people seemed to be perplexed: 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked.

Gradually, the message sunk in. Then Jesus angered the people, reminding them of the proverb 'Doctor, heal yourself' saying he would not be accepted in his hometown. Here, Jesus was making a direct claim to be a prophet. This was too much for the people, and he had to leave Nazareth very quickly.

In this short episode, which Luke places at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he shows the power of scripture, the power of its words, the power of Jesus' words, and by extension, the power of our own words too.

When we use the words of Bible we must do so with care and caution.

So, on this Bible Sunday, drawing on the words of Psalm 19, let it be our prayer that the words of our lips, and the meditations of all our hearts are acceptable in God's sight, not just in church, or over coffee, but in all we say and do.

Amen.