

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Bible Sunday

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Nehemiah 8: 1-12 Ps 119:9-16 Colossians 3:12-17

Matthew 24:30-35

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

On this Bible Sunday, no doubt our gospel reading has been given us because of its rounding final verse:

“Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away”

which is a very emphatic statement by Jesus that his words are everlasting, they can be relied upon, we can put out trust in them.

What is initially less obvious about this statement, but is profoundly significant is that Jesus is saying of his own words, what the Hebrew scriptures say of God's word: Isaiah 40:8 “the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God endures forever”. The God who is described from the first words of the Hebrew scriptures is a God who speaks and whose word does things – brings everything into being in creation and sets the bounds by which life can flourish, and remains. God's word is the first word and the lasting word.

One way of using the language of “God's word” is to say it is the outgoing action of God that creates us and creates us in relationship with God. God is the God who speaks Creation into being, and speaks into that creation his desire for covenant and relationship with the creatures of his love. And the Hebrew scriptures assure us that this creative and covenant creative word is everlasting.

When Jesus says his words will not pass away, we can reasonably understand that this Jesus making clear his divinity, his intimate unity with the creative and covenant making God. He is asking us

to recognise that his own words are the words of God: restoring our creaturely dependence and deepening the covenant in which we live, helping us hear the love of God for us. St John, at the beginning of his gospel, makes this link even deeper when he describes Jesus himself, as the Word of God made flesh. God expressing Godself in human form. The Word that created is enacting God's will as a human amongst us.

So another way that as Christians we take up the term "the Word of God" is as a title for Jesus. The early Christians were compelled to describe Jesus as God because they experienced that creative and covenantal power in relationship with him that they could only explain as God's self-expression to them as a human being: God speaking not just through words on a page, but in person. And Jesus encouraged his disciples to look forward to the time after his historical presence with them was passed, when the Holy Spirit would lead them into and even deeper understanding of God's communication holding them in being and drawing them into the covenantal love of the Godhead. His words were not just to be active in them in his historical presence, but in their ongoing relationship with him through the Holy Spirit poured into their hearts.

The fact that this phrase "my words will not pass away" is given to us on Bible Sunday points to a third way in which we use the term "God's Word": to describe the Bible as both the record of God's active communication with the people of God in past generations and a means of recognizing that through these written words we may be open to understand what God is communicating to us today.

When I was a child I was fascinated by pictures that drew you into them because they seemed to show a picture of you in the picture.

I'll explain better with two examples, one you may remember, the Branston pickle jar label which had a picture of a branston pickle jar on a lunch table, and on the label of the bottle was a picture of a jar with a picture of a pickle bottle on a lunch table.....

I had a summer dress which had an apron attached on and the apron was a picture of a little girl with a dress with and apron and on that apron there was a picture of a little girl with and apron....

You get the idea.

When we listen to the Bible in the midst of our worship, when we study the Bible together united in the Holy Spirit, when we pray with the Bible in conversation with Jesus, the gift of grace is that we can be drawn right into the picture at its deepest : we can be drawn to hear God's everlasting word, spoken for us into our daily lives and experiences guiding us how best to live as God's beloved creatures, and calling us into the fullest communication with the God who creates and redeems us as brothers and sisters of Jesus, sharing in the love of the Trinity.

I find the final verse of our Old Testament reading really beautiful:

"All the people went on their way to eat and drink and make portions, and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them"

They had listened all day to the scriptures, had been touched to the quick when they heard things that called for lament, had been attentive, listening because this was important to them. They had been guided together by those who could give interpretation, who were listening to God themselves and their joy came when the words became understanding: when they had received from the God who speaks, what God needed them to know. These were people who had been through great distress, great change, and were in the process of rebuilding a new way of life. At the heart of weathering the change, inspiring the rebuilding and resilience, was this act of listening to God's word.

Perhaps we can be drawn in to this picture, into picture of the people of God listening to scripture to find understanding of what God is calling us to know about the world we find ourselves in this winter.

It might be an interesting act of imaginative prayer to imagine standing in the crowd at the Water Gate listening to Ezra – I

wonder which words of scripture you might hear, what might come to mind as you ask God to speak into where life is for you at the moment?

Gracious God, by whose word all things have being, open our hearts to hear your word for us, day by day, through Jesus your eternal Word of love for us, Amen.