

**Sunday 26th October 2025**  
**Bible Sunday**

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 45.22-25**

Thus says the LORD,  
Turn to me and be saved,  
all the ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other.  
By myself I have sworn,  
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness  
a word that shall not return:  
'To me every knee shall bow,  
every tongue shall swear.'  
Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me,  
are righteousness and strength;  
all who were incensed against him  
shall come to him and be ashamed.  
In the LORD all the offspring of Israel  
shall triumph and glory.

**GOSPEL: Luke 4.16-24**

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:  
'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'  
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum."' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town.'

Today we're thinking about the Bible. I have to confess, I suspect some of you will know a lot more than me about this subject! I remember when I started at vicar college, my shiny new tutor asked me what I was most looking forward to studying at college. I had to think fast – Biblical studies, I said. I mean, I'd read the Bible, it wasn't that complicated surely?! I then went on to say I wasn't particularly looking forward to the philosophical stuff. Oh, that's what I teach, my tutor said. Please floor, open up and swallow me now!

It turned out I didn't have the right kind of brain for studying the Bible, I was very average; but actually, I did take to philosophy.

I have a theory that it all depends on whether you are a big picture thinker, or whether you like to focus on details. I am definitely the first. So when I talk about the Bible today it's going to be from a larger perspective. The big story.

I was speaking with the lovely Father Michael recently, and he told me a story from his childhood. If you ever see him, ask him to tell you the story about his granddad, the bike with one pedal, and the packet of tatos (which is what crisps are called in Ireland!)

He went out of his way to spin me a great story. And it involved his discovery of a field full of, well, "little folk", playing and having a whale of a time. By that time, I was so invested in the story that, even though my rational brain said it couldn't possibly be

true, the first thing I did when I got home was google “do leprechauns exist?”

If you’re interested, they are actually a protected species under EU law! Make of that what you will!

So, did Father Michael tell me a lie? And if so, could I trust anything he said? I don’t think it was a lie. It was a story. So what was the point of the story? Actually, there wasn’t really one. A better question would be, what effect did the story have? It opened the world of his childhood in rural Ireland, it showed me a deeply imaginative child, and it connected us as friends a little more deeply. Stories have an effect on us, whether we notice it or not, and wherever we hear them. You only have to look at the

unfolding story of the Traitors on television to see how it connects us.

The Bible is no different. It is full of stories. And if we get too hung up on whether or not they are literally true, we can miss the more significant things.

Stories are situated in places and times. Sometimes they are imaginary. Different worlds, different times, different planets sometimes. The Bible has stories that are situated in a time, place, and culture vastly different from our own. But communities were formed around those stories. Jewish people today still tell the stories that give them identity; they still talk about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the crossing of the red sea, the building and destruction of the temple.

We have those stories too, but our faith communities are also formed around the stories of Jesus. We tell them. We re-enact them each week. In fact, if you really want to inhabit the Easter story, come to the services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. We don't just preach the story, we live in it and it's powerful.

You can't just say that because the world wasn't created in 6 days, God doesn't exist and the Bible can't be trusted. You have to handle the Bible with care if you want to discover how it might speak into our lives today. And to do that we need one thing; context. We need to understand who told the stories, why, when, and how they were originally heard.

When I was at college, discovering an unexpected interest in philosophy, I was taught about a dead German theologian called Friedrich Schleiermacher. He is known as the father of liberal theology. What I read of his work was extremely loose theologically, which frustrated me a lot! This was a pastor, a church leader; to my mind he should have been writing about the fundamentals of the Christian faith!

So I had an imaginary conversation with Schleiermacher, on a train, in one of those old Harry Potter style train compartments. And this was the gist.

Me: What about the death and resurrection of Jesus? What about salvation? Baptism? The divinity of Christ?

Schleiermacher: well, there's nothing wrong with believing all that if that's how you connect with God.

Me: you're so airy fairy though. Literally the original woolly liberal! Some stuff is really important. It connects us as communities of believers. Why did you write all that feeling God nonsense, as though that was all you need?

At this point, he settled back in his seat and stroked his beard thoughtfully.

Him: You do know, don't you, that I wasn't actually writing to you? I was writing to some friends of mine who were so caught up in all this new science and art and music and the like that they thought it disproved the existence of God. Or at the very least, God

was no longer relevant. Humans had outgrown God.

And there you have it; context. I was focusing so much on the details of his writing that I forgot about when he was writing, who he was writing to, and why he was writing.

Now there's quite a lot in the Bible that I take issue with. So let's take one in particular. Paul (I find it's generally him!) writing a letter to the church in Corinth: Women should remain silent in the churches. Oopsie!

So Paul and I have words. Another imaginary conversation. It involves me going on a proper feminist rant about patriarchy and the oppression of women throughout history. And then I remind Paul that even in

his time, women led churches, and delivered his letters and explained them (ie preached). And that even he recognized one woman as an apostle. Her name was Junia.

I mean, you know, I let him have it both barrels!

He did that annoying male thing again, he sat there and stroked his beard for a moment.

“You do know that I wasn’t writing to you don’t you”?

Good start, still not satisfied.

“And you do realise that when I wrote that I never imagined my words being taken and obeyed for all time and in all places as if it was God himself who had said it”?

OK that wasn’t on you; but you still wrote it mate!

And then he said:

“You’ve obviously never been to a church service in Corinth when I was writing. Let me tell you about them. Those services were absolute mayhem. If they’d had chandeliers then, they’d have been swinging on them like monkeys! And the noise: it was like, whoever can shout the loudest is the most spiritual. People randomly declaring prophecies and praying loudly in tongues. And if an outsider walked in, they walked straight out again! It wasn’t great for mission!

“So I gave them some instructions. And, I have to admit, I thought if the women could just give it a rest that would immediately cut

the volume by 50%! I wasn't writing to you, or your sister ministers."

Context is crucial when it comes to getting to grips with the Bible. And it's ok to argue with what you read. I don't know exactly what was going through Paul's mind, but we do know something about the church in Corinth at that time.

Some of you have requested that as a church we focus a bit more on helping you read and understand the Bible. So, we're going to do that. In the coming weeks and months we will be offering a course from the Bible Society called, rather unimaginatively, The Bible Course. This is based around videos and discussion. We strongly encourage you to be involved, even if you are familiar with

the Bible, but especially if it's all a bit of a mystery to you.

It's based around two questions:  
What did it mean then?  
What might it mean now?

Context and application.

The context can be explained fairly easily, but the journey to how we receive the message of the Bible today is more complex and sometimes quite contentious.

What we want to do is put tools in your hands to help you with this process, and to help you discover what the Holy Spirit might be stirring in you today.

This ancient book is alive. The Holy Spirit breathes through it today. Yes context is

important so we don't get stuff completely wrong, but God can take words from this book whatever they originally meant and bring them to life in your heart. The Holy Spirit can speak words of strength, hope, love, healing, comfort and peace to you.

Amen.

Jesus knew this. In today's Gospel he reinterpreted the Bible for the people of his time. He knew the original context of Isaiah's words, and he brought them to life; made them relevant. And people reacted; either with wonder or with cynicism. But they reacted.

So let these precious words come to life, let them dwell in you and bring you the very presence of God. Let them take root and grow in you. And let them show you the place you have in God's big story.