



# St

# Andrew's



United Reformed Church  
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

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**Weekly newsletter - issue 98**

Dear friends,

In his latest novel ***Cloud Cuckoo Land***, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Anthony Doerr explores, among other things, how stories come to be — not how they are written, but how they survive. He focuses on a fictional Greek manuscript and portrays some of the hands and lives that it passes through to survive the millennia. Reading this book brought me back to studying ancient Greek and our conversations around the art and history of translation, the different scrolls that have been debated and combined into our modern versions of the Bible.

When you think about it, what a miracle the Bible is. Beyond the God-breathed stories, I'm talking about the physical book.

Imagine all the hands that have touched these texts over millennia.

The scribes, bent over poor candlelight, tracking words on one papyrus with one hand while they copy the text with their other hand on a new, clean sheet. The dusty, dark rooms that scrolls were kept in, and sometimes forgotten about. The stories of ancestors that were told around the firelight, whispered into ears of sleepy children, and proclaimed over meals that, eventually, were written into a narrative. The Bible is a miracle. It is full of human effort, mistakes, and edits. Yet, God blesses it and uses it as a gift to call us to Himself, to remind us of our history. The Bible is our inheritance. It is a constant reminder that God is with us, in all our humanness.

Perhaps this is why the people of Israel wept when they heard Ezra read from the Torah in the shadow of the newly constructed walls of Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10). Perhaps this is why Jesus chooses to begin his public ministry in Luke's Gospel by reading from Isaiah in the Temple of his childhood (Luke 4:14-21). Perhaps this is why Psalm 19 calls the law of the Lord sweeter than "***drippings of the honeycomb***" (v.10). God is with us. In all our human shortcomings, in our pain, in our revisionist history, in our anger, in our joy, God is with us.

As we move through the season of Epiphany, the church calendar invites us to look for the ways that God reveals Himself to us. As Psalm 19 reminds us, the revelation of our Creator is constant and vast, whether it is in the complexity of the universe, the lives of others who follow God, the honest prayers of those who see their shortcomings, the quiet gifts of protection strength, and courage, and the dialogues of faith we have with ourselves, our community, and

God. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 12:12-31 reminds us, too, that God reveals God's self through our community and the combination of all of our gifts. God's presence is not limited to the physical pages of our Bible, the stories these pages contain, or the story of how these pages came to be. God is everywhere and in everything. But God is in the pages of our Bibles – in the stories they contain and in the story of how those pages came to be. What a miracle the Bible is.

## **NEWS**

It is with great sadness that we have been informed of the death of Mrs Pat Alexander, the beloved wife of Mr Ken Alexander. Ken and Pat joined St Andrew's some time ago after worshiping at Tredegarville Baptist Church. They attended many Sundays services with us, unless they were spending time in their caravan in west Wales. Pat has been resident in a nursing home for some time due her failing health. We understand that the service is to be held at St Andrew's, but no date has been arranged yet. Further details will be shared when they are available.

As you can see this is the 98<sup>th</sup> edition of our newsletter and we thought that it would be a good idea to make the one hundredth edition special. So, if you have any article, stories prayers etc that you would like included please hand them to me, send them by email or by post.

We have provided our weekly '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: [https://youtu.be/kN\\_htwPau0g](https://youtu.be/kN_htwPau0g). The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

*Des*

## **Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson**

### **SERMON**

The Gospel of St Luke, chapter 4: verses 14-21 presents us with Jesus' first act of public ministry, described for us in Luke's gospel. Following his river baptism and his long wilderness fast and temptation, Jesus returns to his home country, Galilee. Reports about him have been spreading through the population, probably the result of his healing miracles and his synagogue teaching.

So, when he comes back home, it's quite a big day in the synagogue. Everybody's there, eager to hear the local boy who's making such a name for himself.

We are told that Jesus enters the synagogue on that Sabbath morning. Perhaps it seemed smaller than it looked when he was a child, but otherwise, nothing about this familiar place has changed.

Joseph and Mary prepared him well for life. They raised him faithfully in their ancestral religion. He regularly attended Sabbath school and youth group; they brought him to the synagogue every week – as a baby, a child, a teenager.

It wasn't always easy, especially when he was a baby. And so, Joseph and Mary must be patron saints for all the parents now who bring their babies to worship, who make sure their children get to church school, who see their sons and daughters belong to youth group. It's

not easy. But these parents knew that the child who participates regularly in the community of God's people is likely to have a strong faith in adulthood and a firm foundation during every crisis of life.

So, Jesus returns to the Nazareth synagogue, thankful for the upbringing he received there. He is asked to read the lesson from the prophets. There is no lectionary to consult to determine this reading; the choice is up to him. Nor is there a book to flip through. Instead, a bulky scroll is brought to him and placed upon the lectern. Jesus, searching for a familiar text, unrolls it to a place near the end of the scroll. In a voice strong with anticipation, he reads aloud these words:

***"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."***

Finished with this brief passage, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant and takes his seat. It is the custom for teachers to sit, rather than to stand, so when Jesus sits, everyone looks at him, expecting some commentary, some explication of this text, a text well known to many of them.

There were no professional clergy. The synagogue president can invite any appropriate person to comment on the text. Often these remarks are less than inspiring. While the people are biblically literate, commentary on scripture by such speakers is often no more than rote recitation of lessons all of them learned at an early age.

So, the congregation usually knows what will be said before it is said, and the only question is whether it will be said correctly or not.

Not so that day when Jesus sat down. The people were all looking at him. He looked around at them, those familiar faces from his early years, older in appearance than before: his childhood friends, now present with their children; the parents of his friends, now senior citizens.

He begins with a bombshell, and something much more than a bombshell – a sentence that remains fresh and provocative down to our own time. Jesus set free the scripture passage he has just read; he lets the lion out of its cage; he overthrows the ho-hum expectations of the people around him. Here is what he says: “***Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.***”

Jesus did the unexpected, the unimaginable, on that memorable Sabbath morning in Nazareth. In today’s jargon, he claims those ancient prophetic words as his own personal mission statement. The reason God’s Spirit came crashing down on him at his baptism was to empower him to do precisely this: bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; let all the oppressed go free; announce the sweet time when God’s justice will reshape society.

Jesus takes all this as his mission statement, and he is not content to leave it as only a string of high-sounding words. Everything that follows in his life, as presented to us in the gospel, amounts to the living out of the prophecy he claims for himself that Sabbath morning in Nazareth.

He keeps doing these things every chance he gets, every time he turns around, until finally, it kills him. Some people welcome what Jesus does, but others do not because it upsets their unfair advantage, questions their complacency, and pushes them to recognise their habitual infidelity to God. They find their discomfort increasingly intolerable and think that his judicial murder will bring an end to the matter. They were wrong, of course. Jesus rises alive from the dead and continues today to do what he talked about that Sabbath morning long ago.

Now the way he works is through his mystical body, the church. Through each of us and all who are baptised into his body, Jesus strives still to live out his mission statement, bringing good news to those who don't have any, setting free those chained in captivity, opening blind eyes, helping the oppressed and exploited find a life, and unrolling the floor plan that sets out God's reign where justice and peace prevail.

Jesus still does these things today, because his church does them. The poor gain hope, whether it's their souls or their bodies that are starved. The captives experience freedom, whether they are prisoners in a jail or prisoners in a mansion. The blind receive sight, whether it's cataract surgery at the hospital or the scales of prejudice falling off the eyes of a bigot. The oppressed are set free, whether oppression is a political regime or a chemical dependence.

When Jesus reads that passage in the Nazareth synagogue, he announces a mission statement for himself and for his body, the church.

Reading **1 Corinthians 12:12-31** provides another important passage about how the Body of Christ, the church, is to live out the mission statement of Jesus. As we strive to keep faithful to those words Jesus read aloud and lived out, we can pay attention to three points that St. Paul insists on in that passage.

**Firstly:** All members of the church have gifts for ministry.

**Secondly:** The members of the church have different gifts for ministry; we are not clones of each other.

**Thirdly.** The different gifts come to life in the context of the whole.

Jesus read the old words from Isaiah and claimed them for his own. We can do the same because the Spirit of the Lord is upon us. The Spirit of the Lord has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to proclaim release to the captives. The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to help the blind recover their sight. The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to free the oppressed. The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing.

***Amen.***

## **PRAYERS**

Precious Lord Jesus, Wonderful Holy Spirit, Loving Father, we are grateful that you have touched us and called us to be your servants. Our hearts know you are within us, above us, and all around us.

We thank you for the call you have put on our hearts and lives.

Lord, you call us to follow you - to be your disciples - and you call us to make disciples of others - to be ambassadors of Christ - to share your reconciling love with our neighbours - to be instruments of your righteousness. For this we bless your most holy name

Lord, you call us to follow you - to be your disciples, your students your friends. Strengthen us in our calling. Help us to be disciplined in our daily practice of devotion, prayer, and meditation. Help us to avail ourselves of the nourishment you provide us day by day that we may be the new creation that you seek to make us be. Draw us closer to you and to our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus that we may better know your will and experience the fullness of your grace.

Lord, you call us to be fishers of men - to be your ambassadors, your ministers of reconciliation, your righteousness in the world.  
Strengthen us in our calling.

Lord, help us now when we see the world in its darkness. Help us to know what to do, what to say, and how to say it.

When we see sickness, help us heal.

When we see poverty, help us enrich.

When we see grief, help us give comfort.

When we see power and wealth, help us reflect the blessedness of humility.

When we see a need, help us to stoop down and reach out.

When we need to make decisions, remind us that actions truly done in Your Name and done with humility always bring love.

Help us to see for you, speak for you, and act for you.

Lord, hear our prayers for those upon our hearts today. For those in need of faith and those in need of food. For those in need of healing and those who need wholeness in their relationships.

Lord, we love you. It is just that we are so often caught up in all the work we try to do we forget what we are supposed to be about. Please forgive our humanness. And when you can, make us laugh at ourselves.

Almighty God, You sent Your Son to proclaim Your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us in our worship with the power of Your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive. Bless us with your word, shine upon us with your wisdom, and bring us into deeper communion with you and one another through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We see the glory and power of God when he meets us in our needs and answers our prayers. Let us rejoice and praise his name.

***Creative God***, you continually surprise us, and help us to cope with and do things that are beyond our imagination and expectations; please breathe new life into our traditions and familiar practices, so that we your people, are better equipped to serve you in this changing world.

***Faithful God***, you are present in the struggles and turmoil of life, strengthening the tired and stressed, and defending the needs of the weak and vulnerable; please give courage and hope to those most in need, and help us to protect and help those who work for healing, justice and mercy.

**Loving God**, you are the thread that draws people together into loving and supportive relationships and wants to bring freedom to those who suffer abuse; please help all those who struggle with family life, to find the space and determination to resolve differences and grow in love.

**Merciful God**, who brings healing to those who suffer, purpose to those who feel set adrift, and comfort to those who are lonely and distressed; please fill the lives of those who are unemployed and under-employed and relieve the suffering of all those who struggle with pain, of mind, body or spirit.

**Holy God**, who reigns on high surrounded by those who have served you faithfully across many generations; please welcome into your eternal presence those who have died recently and help us to draw on the stories of their witness to inspire our own journey of faith.

We see the glory and power of God when he meets us in our needs and answers our prayers. Let us rejoice and praise his name.

**Amen.**