

Sunday 16 October 2022
Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)
Trinity 18 (Proper 24)

Genesis 32:22-31
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

I am going to say something about our readings this morning but, before I do that, I want to say a bit about how we actually go about reading Scripture... reading everything we have in this book we call the Holy Bible.

So, when it comes to reading Scripture, I'm a great believer in context. In fact, I believe that there are a number of factors that we should always take into account every time we read Scripture - for example.....

What kind of writing is it? Is it.....history, a letter, a story, proclamation, vision, or is it poetry?

Then we should perhaps think about.....

Time - when did what I'm reading about actually happen?

Perspective - whose perspective have we been given? Are we reading from God's perspective, from a narrator's perspective or from the perspective of one of the characters in the story?

Who are the characters and how do they interact?

What gaps are there? There will always be gaps - always things that are not said. Which gaps should we try to fill and which gaps should we simply leave as gaps?

Then there is the actual context itself - how does the narrative we are reading fit in with what has gone before or perhaps what we know might happen subsequently?

So, I hope you can see from all this that there is work for us all to do when we encounter Scripture. We each have a responsibility to approach it reverently but also with an attitude that says..."I am going to play my part". It is much the same with this sermon time. This period in our worship that we call 'the sermon', requires an effort from the preacher, but it also requires a commensurate effort from you as the listeners.

How do you gauge a sermon? By its length - is it a one sweet or a two sweet sermon? By how well you have been entertained, or perhaps by how well you

have been informed? Maybe by how much you have been distracted by the prospect of the cooked breakfast that awaits you when you get home? Or.....whisper it ever so quietly.....by how much you have been challenged? This sermon time is, or at least it should be, a two way flow.

So, if we apply all these principles to any of our readings this morning, what do we discover?

Let's take the story from Genesis about Jacob's wrestling match. It is such a well-known and well-loved story that it almost demands a more careful reading. In the kind of Sunday-school retellings of it that most of us are used to, so many of the really puzzling details are left out.

To begin with, Jacob is on his own at night because he has sent his people on ahead to try and appease Esau with gifts. Now we all know that Jacob had good reason to be afraid of Esau, and he wants him softened up before he meets him again.

A part of what eventually happens in this story is that Jacob wins a blessing from this stranger he wrestled. But this time, unlike with his brother Esau, where he stole the blessing with trickery, it's a blessing that Jacob has earned by his own effort and pain.

We never find out who this strange wrestler was - though Jacob is convinced that he has met God and, anyway, what was all that wrestling about?

We don't even know who won.

The vital thing in all this narrative is that Jacob didn't give up, even when he was injured.

Then we have the pestering widow in the parable that Jesus told. First of all we need to understand that this is not a real event, it's not history; it's a parable. A parable is an extended metaphor. That's to say that the story is a window through which we can see a larger reality. Clearly, parables require us to work quite hard to get to the point that Jesus wants us to grasp.

So far, these two passages have described, in one way or another, the value of persistence, faithfulness and perseverance. Could it be that that is precisely the point we are supposed to take from Scripture this morning? If it is, and I believe that it could well be, then this is reinforced by all of Paul's exhortations and encouragements to Timothy to be the preacher and evangelist that Paul knows he can be.

But apart from all that, this passage includes the famous lines from Paul that say... "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness". A more accurate translation of the original Greek is that... "All scripture is God breathed". It is this intimacy that suggests that we need a deep and personal relationship with God's word which will, in turn, lead to the persistence, faithfulness and perseverance I was describing earlier.

Maybe for you this is all something of a challenge. On the other hand, maybe you have reached a time in your life when you pour over this book and just can't get enough of it. Or, possibly there was a time when that was true, but maybe not any longer.....perhaps it has all got a bit familiar, a bit boring, you find yourself reading the same bits all the time, you find yourself always thinking the same things every time you read.

Wherever you are with the Bible, I urge you to stick with it.

What is in this book has the power to transform us, and transform us it will if only we would apply the same persistence, faithfulness and perseverance characterised in our readings this morning.

This thing that we take so much for granted - that we grumble about when the readings are too long or too involved - this is God's word to us. It is God's main way of communicating with us, of transforming us.

We need to long for this word, we need to hear this word and we need to be transformed by it. I tell you that you will not only find things in here that will tell you the truth about yourself, that may even cut you to the quick and show you your sin and your brokenness - all of those things.

But also, I guarantee that these words of scripture will point you direct to God, they will point you to the source of hope and they will point you to the source of joy and of gladness.

Because in here is salvation.

Amen.