Last Sunday after Trinity (also Bible Sunday) Jeremiah 31: 7-9; Hebrews 7: 23-end; Mark 10: 46-end

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Today we are marking as the last Sunday after Trinity, the last day of what the Church calls Ordinary Time; that long period through the summer when there are no major feasts or festivals. It’s a sort of quiet, steady time which I really love. From now, though, we are launched into the dizzy days of the Saints: All Hallows Eve, All Saints and All Souls and the Kingdom season, which culminates with the feast of Christ the King at the end of November and leads then directly into Advent.

I took a week’s holiday this past week really in preparation for what I know will be an unrelenting time of busyness. For all of us. We prepare for Christmas, we recover from Christmas, and before we know it, we are heading into Lent and Easter. I’m not trying to wish any of our lives away, but I know how it is. 😊

So it is worth relishing this last Sunday after Trinity for all the above reasons. We could have celebrated the feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles, but we have provision in the lectionary to do that tomorrow. And we could have celebrated Bible Sunday with separate readings entirely. But we have kept the last of Trinity readings. However, it is worth just spending a little bit of time thinking about how we approach and use and read the Bible, as our nod to Bible Sunday.

I can find no information on how Bible Sunday originated, nor how long ago, but since I am asked more often about what a particular Bible reading means than about anything else, maybe it doesn’t matter what its origins are; what matters is what we do when we read the Bible and engage with Scripture.

We are in general not very good at talking about how we interpret and approach scripture. Do I believe the Bible is the unadulterated and infallible word of God? No, actually. The Holy Bible is a collection of texts that is the result of refinement by men who believed they were led by God to discern his teachings.

There is a cartoon currently doing the rounds, which shows Jesus facing a group of what are obviously scribes and Pharisees. And Jesus is saying something along the lines of: the trouble with you all is that you use Scripture to determine what love means, whereas I use love to determine what Scripture means. Now that is a bit black and white, admittedly, but it makes a fair point.

Luther, on the other hand, simply discarded those bits of the Bible that didn’t fit his idea of what the good news meant. So he rejected the epistle of James, for example, because it seemed not to adhere to his understanding of Paul’s writings about faith and works. Clearly Luther’s personal baggage. …

But what baggage do we come to the Bible with? Are we shaped purely by current culture? Or by historic assumptions about life, the universe and everything? Whatever our starting point, we need at least to be aware of what it is; what the lens is that we are looking through; to notice that we are doing it and to ask ourselves why.

I have talked about Lectio Divina before: it is a really appealing way of engaging with Biblical reading – perhaps particularly for something like sermon-writing, but also for those who believe they don’t ‘know’ anything about the Bible and are therefore intimidated by the thought of reading or studying it. Please don’t be those things. We are all theologians, and it is important that we join our own dots; make sense of our own faith; OWN our own faith and take responsibility for our own learning – while understanding that we can still always ask questions of those who seem to know more about it than we do. And I very much include myself in all of those statements.

So Lectio is reflective, meditative, a combination of reading with the head and the heart. Read; meditate; pray; contemplate. So we do all that, and then we take a step back and ask ourselves: what is going on here for me? What is shaping what I am seeing and noticing and finding important about this passage?

And all that then leads into the key question: Who is Christ and what is Christ doing in my life today? The lens, if you like, is Christ; we are with Christ to see Christ. Scripture is not an end in itself; it is a means of seeing Christ. The Bible is not the word of God as such. We will hear at Christmas that the word of God is Jesus Christ (In the beginning was the Word, and all that). But the Bible is words about God and of God, which point us to Jesus Christ. Jesus himself says, in the Sermon on the Mount: you have heard it said (an eye for an eye and so on), but **I** say to you… (there, incidentally, as per that cartoon, is Jesus interpreting scripture via the lens of love).

So on then, bearing all that in mind, to blind Bartimaeus, in today’s gospel. How many blind beggars do you know of who are actually named in scripture or any other first century writings? Actually there is only the one, and here he is. So why does Mark name him? Partly to ground the historicity of his gospel, to counteract the naysayers, those who might question what he is writing. He uses names and geography, and names people as coming from particular places, in order to assure us of the reality he is writing about. We must always remember that these writings are edited; they are written through someone else’s lens and with someone else’s cultural baggage.

But then we might notice that, as we have been working our way through Mark chapter 10 in the past weeks, that the question hovering over all of these episodes is: what is it that you want me to do? And the young rich man, you will remember, wanted to guarantee his place, his inheritance; and finds that eternal life would involve casting aside certain of his idols.

And James and John, wanting to sit on Jesus’ right hand and his left, find that it’s not just about reigning over, but more about the very uncomfortable aspects of doing what Jesus is doing.

And here is Bartimaeus, and Jesus asks again: what is it that you want me to do? And actually that’s quite funny. You can almost hear Bartimaeus saying: well duh, what do **you** think? I’m blind….. But he articulates it: Master, I want to be able to see. And what happens? His sight is restored and Bartimaeus then follows Jesus on the Way. There is something there about our core desire to follow Jesus, but alongside that is the fact that other desires come in and distract us from that.

So that’s what **I** saw in today’s gospel today – or rather yesterday – but what I see in it next time I read it is very likely to be different from that. And so I stop and ask myself: what is going on for me there? Why did I see the text in that way? What is the Spirit leading me towards, to see?

When I hear Jesus speaking, it’s not in a historical bubble, in his day and for his time only: he is not just speaking to the person he is speaking to; he is speaking to the bystanders watching the exchange, and he is speaking to us, and all of that is beyond the text of the scripture. And Bible Sunday or not, beyond the text is where we need to be.

**Amen**