

## **Bible Sunday sermon by Andrew 27 Oct 2019**

### **Luke 4: 16-24**

**One of my clearest memories of Sunday School is this little song – if you remember this it definitely dates you (feel free to join in): “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so”.**

**We’ve just preached the whole Gospel. But that little song for me belongs with other mental images, like the old-fashioned pictures in my Bible. The boy Samuel waking up to God’s call in the middle of the night while the aged Eli slumbers on; Samson killing the lion; Pharaoh’s daughter discovering Moses in the bulrushes and Jesus receiving the little boy’s loaves and fishes at the feeding of the five thousand – although I have to say that last image has been rather spoilt for me since a friend of mine gave me a fridge magnet of that very picture with Jesus sending the boy away, saying: “No, I ordered the herb-crusted cod with a rocket and parmesan salad”.**

**So Bible pictures stick in my mind, but these remembrances apart, I have to say that the Bible has been a major influence on my life and utterly life-changing for millions of people across hundreds of years. I remember trying to read the King James Bible we had at home with its beautiful gilded edges (pristine through never having been read, as was often the case) and that absolutely miniscule print that just about needed a magnifying glass. But I’ll never forget at the age of eleven at a Scripture Union camp first coming across the then brand new “Good News for Modern Man” (what’s now the Good News Bible) and feeling like a whole world had just opened up.**

**I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the children’s film, Jumanji, but in it, a couple of kids find a long-abandoned game lying in the attic. It’s a safari game with pieces in the form of jungle animals and a hunter that move around the board; but as the children open the lid what happens just blows them away. They get literally sucked into the game; suddenly tropical storms break over their heads, monkeys swing from the ceiling, a thundering river crashes through their living room, a rhinoceros stampedes down the hall. No longer are the children playing a story, moving pieces. They become the story and they find themselves being moved.**

**Now opening up the Bible isn’t quite that alarming, but there’s something of that experience in it. Get into God’s story and I guarantee it will change you and move you every time you go to it. This is why there are Gideon Bibles in hotel bedrooms and hospitals, because down the years thousands of lonely executives and frightened patients have found in its pages a reality and insight that speaks to their pain. This is the living word of God and it never returns empty.**

**This is also a living word that makes the powers of this world tremble. In Ravensbruck concentration camp Bibles were banned. In one of the huts two elderly Dutch sisters, Corrie and Betsie Ten Boom, sent to the camp for hiding Jews, somehow managed to hide just a few pages of the New Testament. Night after night they would read those verses as their fellow inmates lay on their bunks or huddled near them, straining to**

catch every word, reaching out for the light and the hope of the God who is light in even the deepest darkness. So this is a Word that sheds light, that transforms.

By contrast when Jesus is in his own hometown and he reads God's word, the people don't want that light, they don't want anything to change. And it isn't just the business of "och, we kent his faither" – who does *he* think he is? It's because he announces a word they don't want to hear. Because the challenge of Jesus is: Are you willing to open up that dusty old game, that risky word of God, and get pulled right into the heart of it and accept the mystery and the adventure of it as well as its comforts and its joys.

I couldn't think of a better Gospel or a better Sunday for us to be beginning our new adventure together than this one, because these readings are for us. The Spirit of God is upon Jesus. The Spirit of God is upon us. Are we willing to get into God's adventure and see where his living Word is going to lead us - together? We don't know what's going to happen. Not long ago I watched a youtube video which showed an elderly monk reflecting on his vocation and he says: You know, for years I thought I'd chosen this life; only eventually it dawned on me that I hadn't done the choosing - I'd been chosen.

That insight has really made me think. We think something is our idea, but in reality God has spoken a new word. He's chosen us for this moment. All of you, who've been faithfully here for years and me just arrived, and he's going to speak a new Word to us and through us. So it's going to be our job to listen together really deeply, and – unlike those folks in Nazareth – be open to God's new thing, the new word that he's going to speak and bring to life right here in our midst the years to come. I've been at this a long time, so have you, but I'm excited to be here – what's God going to do? He speaks the Word and new things happen. Always. Every time. His Word never returns empty. It's risky, but we trust that just as God's been with us until now – with all the folks who have faithfully worshipped and ministered here right from the beginning – so he'll be with us every step of the way ahead.

Because: Jesus loves us, this we know, for the Bible tells us so. And the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us, in the Word we proclaim, in our love for each other, and in the bread and wine we're just about to share. Amen.