

Just before Christmas, our older son Anthony had to be away on business for two weeks leaving our daughter in law Angie to look after the two children. During that time Rachel and myself would head across some nights to help her put the children to bed. On one particular night, I had headed across and I was in the process of putting Ryan down to sleep, leaving Angie to feed Rory. That night Ryan was missing his father and took a dim view of Granpa putting him to bed instead of his Mum. I explained that I would read him his story and Mum would be up to kiss him night night. The child, barely two and a half, stood up in his cot, with a look that was the spitten image of his father, and declared, ‘I want my Mummy – you get out.’ I looked at him and thought, ‘Child, you are the image of your father.’

Today, in our Gospel reading, we read of the Baptism and of his temptations in the wilderness. We read sections of this story of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday. The rationale for that is in our Gospel reading for today, as the voice from heaven declares, you are my son. As we read this we recall the account of the Transfiguration, that we read last Sunday, and the words heard by the disciples: ‘This is my Son listen to him,.’

And so the Scriptures lie at the heart of our worship. One of the features of our Anglican tradition is our ordered reading of the Scriptures, Sunday by Sunday. In the course of our three year cycle of readings we reflect on all the major themes of scripture and our readings are drawn from all sections of the Bible.

During the week I was in the Burrow School for their Assembly. On that occasion the Assembly had been prepared by 4th Class. They began by asking

us to think of stories that we enjoyed and then went on to think of the stories that Jesus told. Last Friday they were thinking about the Parable of the Sower. They then said something that I found very profound. They said, when we get really engaged in a story, really drawn into that story, we become the illustrators of that story.

That set me thinking about the words that we heard last Sunday. ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him’. At what level do we listen to the story we hear read Sunday by Sunday here in Church? Between now and Easter we will be following the story of Jesus as he journeys towards Jerusalem. We will hear of his teaching, his healing. We will hear of ways in which he challenged people to think differently – differently about God, about each other, about other people – and finally we will hear of the events that lead up to his death on the Cross and his resurrection.

What does it mean for us to become illustrators of that story? What that means for me is that we don’t just hear the story; we become changed by the story. There is a lovely old prayer that asks that what we hear with our ears, we may believe in our hearts and what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives. Brother Roger of Taizé used to have a lovely expression. He said that we are called to be a ‘people of the Beatitudes’. In other words we don’t just hear the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we become living expressions of that teaching:

Blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the merciful, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

It has been said of the Bible, that it is not just a matter of us reading the Bible, the Bible reads us. When this happens, there is a resonance between the words we read, the words we hear and our daily living. On occasions, this will be one of encouragement; on other occasions the words we read and hear will challenge us. What we are talking about here is an engagement with the Scriptures, that as we read and hear the scriptures we not only hear and read the words of the Bible but in and through them hear God's word to us and for us.

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
help us so to hear them,
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.