Liturgy 3 the word - lectionary and sermon

“The days are surely coming says the Lord” That’s how our reading from the Old Testament starts ….**Says the Lord**. The reading then repeats that phrase 5 more times “Says the Lord”

We are a people of the book, the bible, a people of scripture, of the word of God written down. The Bible is our book, it is the primary way we encounter and engage with God. The Bible itself is the record of people’s relationship with God over thousands of years. It is not a simple book, just like the relationship, and any relationship is not simple.

The Bible is not one book but a collection of books – a miniature library of books. Books written and selected and edited by the God’s people at various stages in their history. Each book is different. Each book has its own story. There are different types of book, from history to law to biography to poetry.

What we do with the Bible as Anglicans is similar to many of the mainstream churches. We read a lot of scripture in our services. We have four bible readings almost every week. We have an OT, a Psalm, a NT and a Gospel reading. Why do we do that? So we can hear the Bible together. And in order to do that we have a lectionary – a guide to readings.

The readings have been chosen by an international group of scholars and representatives of Churches. The readings have been chosen to be the highlights of scripture – not the whole of scripture. One approximation online said the lectionary includes:

15 percent of the Old Testament (not counting the Psalms)

80 percent of Psalms

55 percent of the non-Gospel New Testament

90 percent of the Gospels

Each year we focus on one of the three Gospels – Matt, Mark, Luke. John is used for special occasions.

The readings we use do not attempt to have a common theme – instead they stick to following the highlights of a different book in turn.

The psalms are hymns from the Israelites. They are there as very human responses to God, and are often linked to the OT reading. Saying, chanting or singing the Psalms is a very Anglican thing!

So there is a lot of scripture in our service. It amuses me that we hear more scripture every week in our church than most of the “Evangelical” “Bible believing” churches. And when we listen to scripture we listen to it in context. We don’t take a verse here and a verse there and mix them together to say what we want them to say. Sometimes the scripture is uncomfortable. Most of the scripture you hear in Church is not going to be interpreted for you.

I have always been content to primarily let the Bible speak for itself. To let God speak through the words of Bible. Because I believe that God can do that. And I believe that you can listen for yourselves. And that is the first challenge for us as we come to this part of the service. We have gathered, we have said we want to be open to God, open to Jesus. And now comes the word of God. The is a practice call Gospel discipleship where we listen to the same reading three times and each time share what we have heard.

But that’s not what happens in the sermon. The sermon means many things to many people – here’s three things it means to me.

i) It brings the bible and the newspaper together

ii) It is inspiration not instruction

iii) It is part of our worship part of the same connection to God

i) It brings the bible and the newspaper together

This is an idea from a famous theologian what he meant was that a sermon should connect the scriptures with what is happening today, in fact the Bible should help us interpret the news – we should understand the news in the light of the Bible. Humans haven’t changed much in 2000 years, our relationship with God has the same basis whether we are Romans or Canadians. We still have the same issues and the same basic needs. I aim to show how the Bible is as relevant today as it has always been

ii) It is inspiration not instruction

I love this image – it shows a mind lit up. That’s what I hope – That your minds will be lit up - not with ideas but with the Holy Spirit. Inspiration not instruction – if I wanted to instruct I would do it differently. Sermons are opportunities for God to move in us. That’s why we pray “May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be guided by God.” Sermons are intended to inspire – to give you something to take away for the week, to reflect on, a way to let God in to your lives

iii) It is part of our worship

We come to church to connect – to connect to God and connect to each other. That’s what our worship is. And the sermon is a part of that connection to God together. It is something we share in together. It should always point us to God together.

So here is the thing – as we hear the Scripture read, we listen for God to speak. As we hear the scripture and the newspaper brought together, we listen for God to speak. This part of the service is where we fulfill that prayer we say at the beginning – to open our hearts to God.