

Bible Sunday • *The Last Sunday after Trinity*
Proper 25 (Sunday between 23 and 29 October inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Nehemiah 8.1-4a [5-6] 8-12	Ezra reads the book of the law, with interpretation
Psalm 119.9-16	I will ponder your precepts
Colossians 3.12-17	Let the Word of Christ find its home in you
Matthew 24.30-35	Jesus says: 'my words will not pass away'

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The second coming

Jesus said to his disciples: ³⁰“The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” with power and great glory. ³¹And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

³²From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’

Matthew 24.30-35 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

When we read about the ‘end times’ people very readily ask about when it will happen, and try to discern the ‘signs of the times’. Jesus warns against this sort of thing (24.26). He speaks of a troubling, disturbing

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

time, of the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light (24.29). He is saying that Daniel's vision (Daniel 7.13-14) will be fulfilled. He is telling the disciples, not so much to discern the signs, as to be ready.² He tells them to learn from the fig tree (24.32). He says plainly, 'before this generation has passed away, all these things will take place' (24.34). Jesus has disrupted time for good. He has broken into time from eternity, and the eternal dimension is here to stay. The disciples are not asked to predict anything, but are asked to be ready and prepared.

Jesus says, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (24.35). This gives something to guide the disciples in a turbulent world. In Matthew's time the temple has been destroyed, and Gentiles are joining the fledgling church. Jesus' teaching has challenged the understanding of groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees. So what can be relied on? The words of Jesus. Not surprisingly, this passage has been chosen for Bible Sunday, the 'Last Sunday after Trinity', and quite close to the feast day of Martin Luther, 31 October, in fact, in the Lutheran Church it is called 'Reformation Sunday'.

The danger is that the Bible comes to be used as a reference manual, or a scientific textbook, rather than as the rich blend of folk tales, history, prophecy and poetry that it is.

Quotations

1

The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly.

Provocations: spiritual writings of Kierkegaard / Søren Kierkegaard. 1999

2

I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.

'Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina', Galileo Galilei. 1564–1642

² *Matthew* / Stanley Hauerwas. – London : SCM, 2006. – (SCM theological commentary on the Bible). – 978-0-334-04111-2. – p.206.

3

If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.

St Augustine of Hippo, 354–430

Related topics

For further study:

The Bible

Closing Prayer

God, Creator and Saviour,
yours is the word by which all things came to be,
the word of liberation in Law and prophets,
and finally, the Word made Flesh in Jesus your Son.
Let Christ abide in us;
touch our senses, enlighten our minds
and let your Spirit transform us into a people who do
everything in his name,
their lives a song of blessing and praise.
We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Celebrating the Christian Year, Bible Sunday, Year A³

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³ *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.