

Closing Prayer

Transcendent God,
 your word has gone forth
 to accomplish your purpose of salvation.
 Grant to us a spirit of discernment and faith,
 and as we hear, read and contemplate the holy Scriptures
 lead us to discern therein
 the presence and work of Christ,
 and to know him, who is our eternal life.
 We ask this in his name,
 who is alive, and reigns for ever and ever.

Collect for Bible Sunday, Year B²

Bible Sunday

(The Last Sunday after Trinity)

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 55.1-11	Seek the Lord while he is near
Psalm 19.7-14	
2 Timothy 3.14--4.5	Be guided by scripture which is inspired by God
John 5.36b-47	The scriptures testify to Jesus

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

Jesus replies to his critics

³⁶Jesus said: ‘The works that the Father has given me to complete,
 the very works that I am doing,
 testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

³⁷And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf.
 You have never heard his voice or seen his form,

³⁸and you do not have his word abiding in you,
 because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

³⁹You search the scriptures
 because you think that in them you have eternal life;
 and it is they that testify on my behalf.

⁴⁰Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹I do not accept glory from human beings.

⁴²But I know that you do not have the love of God in you.

⁴³I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me;
 if another comes in his own name, you will accept him.

⁴⁴How can you believe when you accept glory from one another
 and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

⁴⁵Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father;
 your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope.

² *Celebrating the Christian Year : Prayers and Resources [...] / comp. Alan Griffiths. – Vol. 1. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004.*

⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.

⁴⁷But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?

John 5.36b–47 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus points to his actions as witness to the origin of his mission (v.36), and to scripture to testify for him too (v.39). He is referring to what we call the Old Testament. How well do we know these texts? Think of some texts that might be referring to Jesus. How would you summarise what the Old Testament is about? Which are the most important Old Testament books, in relation to the coming of Jesus?

Jesus is responding to those who criticise him for healing a sick person on the sabbath (John 5.17) and for claiming knowledge of God as Father (John 5.17-18). Because of these things his critics are blind to the good that he does and ignorant of the true meaning of his words and actions. Can you think of any present days examples that are like this?

‘You search the scriptures ...’ (v.39). Do we bolster our own position sometimes by reference to scriptures out of context?

The fact that Jesus healed on the sabbath goes against tradition; as early as Jeremiah 17.21 and Nehemiah 13.19, it was not permitted to carry a burden on the sabbath.

Jesus knows where he comes from – ‘I have come in my Father’s name (v.43) – and where he is going (he says he will not accuse his critics ‘before the Father’ (v.45).

Only by looking at Jesus positively can a person grasp the testimony of the Father; only those who believe in Jesus can see how the Father’s testimony is present in the Son. The essential precondition is ‘love of God’ (v.42).

John is interested in the theme of ‘glory’ – human glory is contrasted with the glory that comes from God (vv.41,44).

Why does Jesus appeal to the figure (or books) of Moses?

Quotations

1

Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand.

Mark Twain 1835–1910

2

Nobody ever outgrows scripture; the Book widens and deepens with our years.

Charles H. Spurgeon 1834–92

3

If there be any difference among professed believers as to the sense of Scripture, it is their duty to tolerate such difference in each other, until God shall have revealed the truth to all.

John Milton 1608–74

4

Arguments about Scripture achieve nothing but a stomachache and a headache.

Tertullian c.155–230

5

I perceived how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.

William Tyndale c.1494–1536

Related topics

For further study:
Scripture

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.