

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE BY THE REVEREND STUART
LANGSHAW ON SUNDAY AUGUST 6, 2017**

SEVENTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT THE HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE

THE GOSPEL READINGS

Today's is the seventh sermon in our series as we preach our way through the service of Holy Communion.

Have you ever thought about the 5-step fuss we make of the reading of the Gospel in our Communion Services in our churches, and here at St Andrew's? Firstly, the book containing the Gospel readings is kept on the Communion Table, not on the Lectern. Then we have a special hymn to welcome the Gospel Reading. (At 8 am the Gospel is read from up near the Communion Table and not from the Lectern). The third step is that we form a procession and carry the Gospel-reading book down into the middle of the congregation. Fourthly before and after the Gospel reading we have a special (sung) response. The fifth step is that, during the Gospel Reading everyone is standing – (and people turn in their pews so that they are) facing the Gospel. It makes the Gospel and its being read the centre of attention at that moment in the service. You see, the Gospel Reading is not just another Bible reading. We surround it and mark it with these special activities and rituals. There is clearly something going on here that is different to the Old Testament Reading and to the Psalm and to the New Testament reading.

In the Gospel readings from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, we hear about what Jesus did ... we listen to what Jesus said ... we open our minds and hearts to hear what God will say to us through the Holy Spirit as the text of the Gospel is read. We stand for the Gospel Reading as a mark of respect and honour for this reading. After all, it will be a reading about our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and therefore it is deserving of these expressions of respect. Christians have been standing for the Gospel reading since the 4th century of the Christian era ... for 1,600 years. It's a very ancient custom. The gradual hymn... the procession ... the turning to face the Gospel ... the sung responses **all** these are the ceremony we perform when we read the Gospel in our liturgy.

The very word "gospel" means "good news." Sunday by Sunday we have the good news about Jesus Christ read aloud to us. And it is good news! It is the good news of what God was doing in the years that Jesus was alive on the earth and engaged in his ministry.

We have said in these sermons that the *Prayer of Preparation* is like a magnifying glass, and *The Gloria* is like a fireworks display. If you want to think about it this way, the Gospel Reading is like a bright spotlight shining on a darkened stage – and that spotlight is focused on the person of Jesus. We are the followers of Jesus Christ ... we are "Christ-ians." The more we hear and read and know and understand and practise the life and teachings of Jesus, the more effective that spotlight is for us.

While there are 4 **books** of Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – there are 2 **types** of Gospels. The first type is the "Synoptic Gospels" – Matthew, Mark and Luke. And the second type is John. The word **synoptic** means literally "together sight." To call them "synoptic gospels" means that Matthew, Mark and Luke "see together with a common view." They see

Jesus' life together with a common view about it. Matthew, Mark and Luke cover many of the same events in Jesus' life and in much the same order. Scholars think that Matthew and Luke relied quite a bit on Mark as they wrote their gospels, because nearly 90% of Mark's content is found in Matthew and about 50% of Mark's gospel appears in Luke. All of Jesus' parables are found in the three synoptic gospels - - - surprisingly, there are no parables in John's Gospel.

While Matthew, Mark and Luke may "see Jesus' life together with a common view," there are differences between them, too. Matthew and Luke are considerably longer than Mark. Matthew was written for a Jewish audience, and he quotes frequently from the Old Testament for his Jewish readers. Mark was written for a Roman audience and Luke for a broader gentile audience. Luke emphasizes Jesus' acts of compassion toward Gentiles and Samaritans.

John's Gospel is different in many ways from the other three in the way that it presents Jesus, and in the order in which it records some of the events of Jesus' ministry. It was probably written later than the three Synoptic Gospels, and, rather than simply recording what Jesus said and did, it contains also some theological reflections. John's gospel contains a series of what it calls "signs" - that gospel's word for Jesus' miracles. The whole purpose of John's gospel is presented at the end of the book, in John 20:31 - "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name."

It's interesting to notice that Peter and Paul and John in their letters in the New Testament take the gospel teachings of Jesus and apply them to the people they wrote to. As an example, Jesus said, "LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU." (John 13:34). In his first letter, Peter wrote, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, LOVE ONE ANOTHER EARNESTLY FROM THE HEART." (1 Peter 1:22). In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, "Owe no one anything, except to LOVE ONE ANOTHER ..." (Romans 13:8). And in his first letter St John wrote, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that WE SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER." (1 John 3:11).

The Gospel readings shine a second bright spotlight ... on us. In the brightness of that light we can see how we are going in putting Jesus' example and teachings into practice. In the brightness of that gospel spotlight, can we see that we are loving one another, as Jesus told us to do? In the brightness of that gospel spotlight, can we see that we are making up quickly with those who have offended us, or whom we have offended, as Jesus commanded us to do in the Sermon on the Mount? In the brightness of that gospel spotlight can we see that we are concerned about and caring practically for the poor and the downcast and the oppressed as we see in Jesus' example?

It would be different if the Gospel readings were simply interesting bits of philosophy from a long-ago time and a long-away place. But they are not. The Gospel readings are sharp, piercing, relentless, uncomfortable spotlights that reveal the quality and texture of our Christian lives.

We make a five-step fuss of the Gospel Readings in our services ... in them we hear Jesus' teachings and see Jesus' example ... they cause us to examine what we do and the way we do it and the reasons we do it ... what we say and how we say it and the motives we have for saying it ... they are all illuminated by the spotlight of the Gospel readings.

"We have a gospel to proclaim," the gospel-reader thinks as he or she goes in procession to read the Gospel reading. "We have a gospel to proclaim" we shall soon sing in the words of the stirring hymn. "You have a gospel to proclaim" says our Lord, Jesus Christ as we go back into our routine and lives outside Church. "We have a gospel to proclaim" by word, by deed, by attitude. Let's proclaim it. (1315 words).