

SUNDAY PLUS

Don't be afraid!

Jesus' geography lesson

by Dr Bridie Stringer

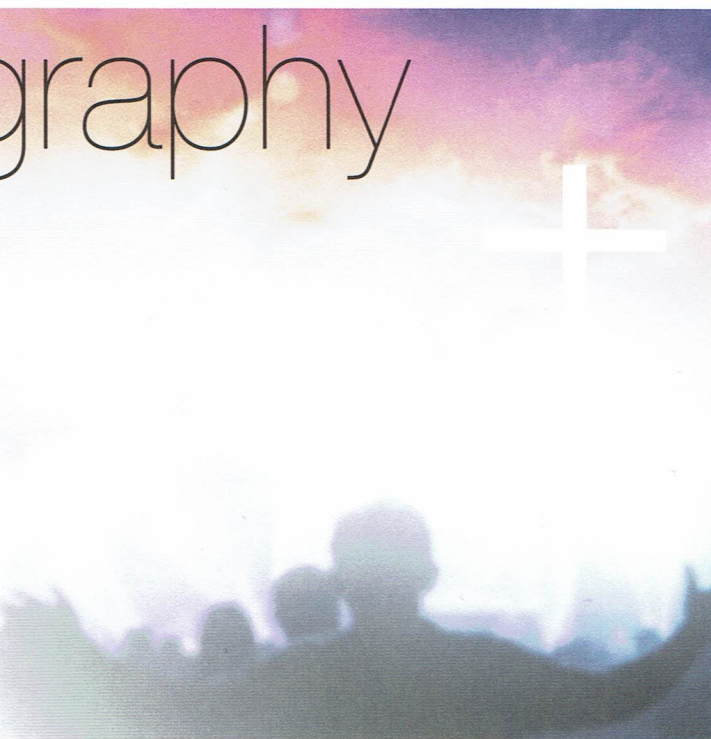
Jeremiah's prophesy uses the imagery of the wasteland, a place where the body and the spirit both wither and die. He contrasts this with the blessed, who flourish like a strong and fruitful tree by the water's edge. The choices on offer are what we would term a "no brainer". However, when we move on to the Gospel reading, we are given images of hunger, mourning and weeping and seem to be invited to consider these a blessing and not a punishment.

Is this Gospel a manifesto for discrimination and bullying? Are those who are living in poverty supposed to accept it with joy? Of course not! In this reading, we tend to miss the

opening sentence which describes the people assembled to hear Jesus and to be healed. Does it really matter that the great crowd came from Judaea, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon?

Here, Luke is putting geography at the service of the Gospel.

It is no accident that the towns of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile towns, are listed with those of Judaea and especially Jerusalem, the seat of power, authority and the law. Jesus is treating them all alike. He excludes no one, heals them all and gives a stark warning to those who are privileged at the expense of others. The message for us is clear and unambiguous – as you do to others, it will be done to you.



And as for the geography lesson, perhaps the message for our time is to be mindful of not judging people by their postcode.

Dr Bridie Stringer, who is married with two daughters, a son-in law and "two adorable grandsons", is also an associate lecturer in Pastoral Theology at St Mary's University, Twickenham.

Joy in adversity

by James Gallogly

"Woe to you when all speak well of you" certainly turns our modern meritocratic ideal on its head. Both the Old and New Testaments remind us that adversity does not necessarily have the last word.

We shouldn't be afraid to live out our faith and be proud of our heritage. Little things can go a long way: there is usually no need for us to be "exclude[d]" and "revile[d]" before

we succeed in making a difference to people's lives.

When passing a church it was once the custom to make the sign of the cross. This acknowledged the presence within of the Blessed Sacrament – a powerful witness. I commend it to you.

Similarly, many of us appear a little squeamish about a bow at the name of Jesus. Simplicity has great power. It may lead to a conversation about why you are doing such a thing. Embrace the moment of witness and do not be afraid!

James Gallogly is a Catholic prison chaplain.

God believes in you

by Claire Wright

"Who sits with the knowing that God's belief in you is even stronger than yours in him?" (*The Broken Way* by Ann Voskamp)

The most common command in the Bible is "do not be afraid". More than anything else, God wants us to know, not only that we can trust in him, but also that he believes in us. This does not mean that our life will be without trouble. It does not mean there will be no pain. It is a promise that God is there with us through it all, and that none of it is without reason and purpose.

The one who trusts in God "is like a tree by the waterside... when the heat comes, it feels no alarm, its foliage stays green; it

has no worries in a year of drought and never ceases to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:8)

The heat may come, the drought may hit, but God's belief in us never falters. He continues to choose, to bear fruit in us. We only have to let him do so.

Claire Wright is a Brighton-based freelance writer who runs a faith blog and a healthy family food website, all while taking care of two lively toddlers.

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Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by the newness that Christ alone can give. May his tenderness and love guide our steps.

Pope Francis

Lord, you promised us a heavenly reward for standing up to adversity on your behalf, but I'm not sure that I want life to be uncomfortable even in view of long-term benefits. Give me courage. Help me to trust in your promise. Help me to lovingly face up to life's difficulties, knowing that you are with me. Amen.

Today: Jeremiah 17:5-8 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20 Luke 6:17, 20-26	Monday: Genesis 4:1-15, 25 Mark 8:11-13	Tuesday: Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10 Mark 8:14-21	Wednesday: Genesis 8:6-13, 20-22 Mark 8:22-26	Thursday: Genesis 9:1-13 Mark 8:27-33	Friday: 1 Peter 5:1-4 Matthew 16:13-19	Saturday: Hebrews 11:1-7 Mark 9:2-13	Next Sunday: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 Luke 6:27-38
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