

TRINITY 5. (2026)

If I am honest, I find it impossible to tie up our two readings in any meaningful way. The long Genesis reading seems to be about an arranged marriage communicated through Isaac's servant, whereby Rebekah drops everything (including her water jar) to travel with her maids and camels, to finally meet Isaac in his mother Sarah's tent, and the rest is history, as they say. We like happy endings, like Taylor Swift finally tying the knot in the largest New York Stadium she could find which only a billionaire with 1,000 guests could afford!

We may like stories of romance or even tales of jealousy, but our Gospel reading seems to be about disharmony, "this generation" – a pejorative term usually used by an older generation referring to those much younger than them. 'The millennials' is a horrid phrase which comes to mind...and in the Gospel text, it is John the Baptist and Jesus who are in the firing line (for quite different reasons). Both are referred to as party-poopers; John being the one who abstains from dancing and drinking looking miserable in the corner of the marquee; Jesus being the one who is a "glutton and a drunkard" according to Matthew's reporting, and even worse, this Jesus is "a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

The inference seems to be that all this gossip and social media speak is all 'fake news' and those who treat either John or Jesus as 'super heroes' or rather, the opposite, are mistaken or being misled. People who invest in complaining about every little thing seem to be immune to discovering

new possibilities, or a new direction, what is also described as 'abundant living' by Jesus. That's when understanding truth and equity sets us free from staying at home, or looking glum in the corner of the tent. A Christ-filled life is one which leads us to believe in and pray to God for the gift of hopefulness, humility, and a more joy-filled future.

Isn't that our deepest wish for our children or grandchildren? I think of those who have just finished their exams unsure of their next steps. I think of those who think they have failed in some way by not reaching the dizzy heights their parents or teachers expect of them or demand of them.

In quite different times, Cranmer's prayer book highlights these 'comfortable words' as they are known:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."

We see things differently when we come to Christ, when we lay our lives before him and when we rely upon him in good times and in bad. All those ordained last week as deacons or priests will, I hope, know that already. What perhaps most Bishops never really say to those called to that happy day, is that their lives will never quite be the same again. When my sister-in-law and our niece stayed for a few days, they were amazed at people knocking at the door and the phone ringing at the same time; that real human mix of need or sadness or encouragement and joy. I don't believe John the Baptist or Jesus can be given these 'black and white' portraits of

‘opposites’: happy or sad, prophetic or nostalgic, cruel or kind. But what I learn from this Gospel reading, like so many others, is that our faith is intended to be a journey of discovery, expectation and promise, as it was, for Rebekah. Of course, an overly romantic or nostalgic view of life will inevitably disappoint or fail us.

What is really being asked of us is to come to the living waters in which we were all baptised, and stay refreshed, keep seeing in the new, more as a fulfilment of the old. There doesn't need to be any conflict. It is like people saying (as they do) ‘I don't really like modern Art’... but Piero Della Francesca was modern once, as Constable was, as David Hockney will continue to be... for a little while longer!

New disciples, and new vocations are really necessary if the Church is to flourish and grow. Increasing secularisation demands that we look hard at the ‘now’ as well as the future. How can we plant, nourish, shape or build on the kernel of our faith with those around us, our neighbours or colleagues at work? Is it really so embarrassing to speak of God or Christian social thought and action? Andy Burnham doesn't think so. And although definitely not to be mistaken as our Saviour, it is surely good and encouraging that his catholic faith is not to be underestimated or, easily dismissed. There are prejudices everywhere and negativity comes easily when people, for example, even refer to me as ‘too high church’, whatever that means. I was always taught that it is dangerous to walk in the middle of the road, but I digress!

Let's just end with a moment's silence as we slowly read to ourselves today's wonderful Collect, or if you do not have it in front of you, just ask for God's presence to lead us in hope.