

Reflection for Sunday, October 5, 2014: Proper 22

University Chapel Anglican Community, Morning Eucharist Service &

Anglican Togetherness Group Evensong

'Responding to God in the Vineyard'

By Dr Suzanne Shirley-Newnham

Prayer:

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of (our) hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 5: 1-7 (NRSV)

"Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

² *He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;*

he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it;

He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

³ *And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,*

judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴ *What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?..."*

Friends, it came to me on reflecting on this passage that we are privileged to be gathered in a special corner of God's vineyard. Many of us work or have worked in this area – the Mona campus and its environs –and many of us also make our home in this corner of the Liguanea plain. **What makes this area special?**

There is the obvious natural beauty of the landscape – impressive mountain range melding into plain, the Hope River and its watershed supplying fertile lands abounding in many species of fruit trees and attractive flowers – beauty which we arguably often take for granted.

There is the history of the region which has mirrored that of Jamaica's development as a whole. Evidence suggests that the Tainos were the first developers of the land, occupying the area from the early part of the Seventh Century (*Satchell, 'Hope Transformed'*). The conquest and occupation of Jamaica by the Spanish

(1494 – 1655) and subsequently the English (1655 – 1962) saw increased cultivation of this fertile zone, including the establishment of three major sugar estates during the period of slavery – the Hope, Papine and Mona estates. Following the abolition of slavery, further developments took place under the English administration including the construction of various educational institutions - an agricultural school at Hope, the Jamaica and Papine High Schools, the University College of the West Indies on the site of the Gibraltar camp at Mona and the Jamaica Institute of Technology on Hope lands adjacent to Papine.^{1,2} The years following Independence have seen a boom in the area’s physical, social and cultural development, spurred on by an expanded number and size of these educational institutions, in particular the tertiary settings of the University of the West Indies at Mona, the now University of Technology at Hope/Papine and the United Theological College of the West Indies sited between the two.

Herein lies what makes this area truly special – not just its geography or its history, but the ongoing potential – **always poised** to significantly impact Jamaica and the wider Caribbean through the teaching, training and mentoring of our young men and women entrusted to our care as they matriculate at these institutions in a wide variety of fields of study.

Anglican staff members who work at these tertiary institutions recently gathered at an ATG convened workshop and heard from Dr. Carol Archer (Utech/NEPA) that the Government of Jamaica through the National Environment & Planning Agency (NEPA) is now seeking to streamline further expansion of this region, which it is proposing to be called “**Papine University Town**”.³ NEPA has outlined various **challenges to be addressed** including the provision of adequate accommodation to serve the ever increasing numbers of students coming to the area, the need for improvements to other aspects of the physical infrastructure including water and sewage as well transportation. NEPA also recognizes that there are **critical social concerns** – these communities are also home to increasing numbers of elderly persons, as well as the sick and disabled who receive treatment and care at local centres including the Hope Institute, the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre and the University Hospital of the West Indies.

⁷ *For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
He expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!”(Isaiah 5:7)*

Gathered, kept, sustained and blessed in this special corner of God’s vineyard – what should our response as a Christian community be – to the continued growth and development, and hand-in-hand the varied challenges facing Papine University Town?

St. Paul's words from the New Testament lesson for today – *“¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” (Phil 3:17)*

I agree – the lives of the saints provide time and again powerful lessons and encouragement for our journey and critical guidance in addressing the matter of our response to God's providence – the matter of our stewardship of all He has given us. Today, October 5, is sandwiched between the Church's celebrations of two great men of God. Yesterday was the feast day for St. Francis of Assisi, who continues to encourage multitudes of Christians all over the world to pathways of self-sacrificing obedience and service. I thought we could look though at a Christian leader whose name will be recognized by some, but whose life testimony is less well known than that of St. Francis.

Tomorrow, October 6, the Church celebrates the life and work of **William Tyndale** - priest and scholar who prepared the first complete translation of the New Testament into English and the first English Bible to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts. Tyndale was born around 1494 in Gloucestershire, England, and educated at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge where he became a strong supporter of church reform. He was ordained as a priest in around 1521 and returned to Gloucestershire to serve as a chaplain to a member of the local gentry. Tyndale's controversial opinions began to attract the attention of the church authorities.

i) Availability for God

Tyndale was from a family of means and status, and was also a gifted scholar – versed in eight languages. Arguably his life could have gone in many different directions. He **chose** however to give his talents and resources in service to God, even though it would cost him dearly.

Being fully available for God – hallmark of the saints!

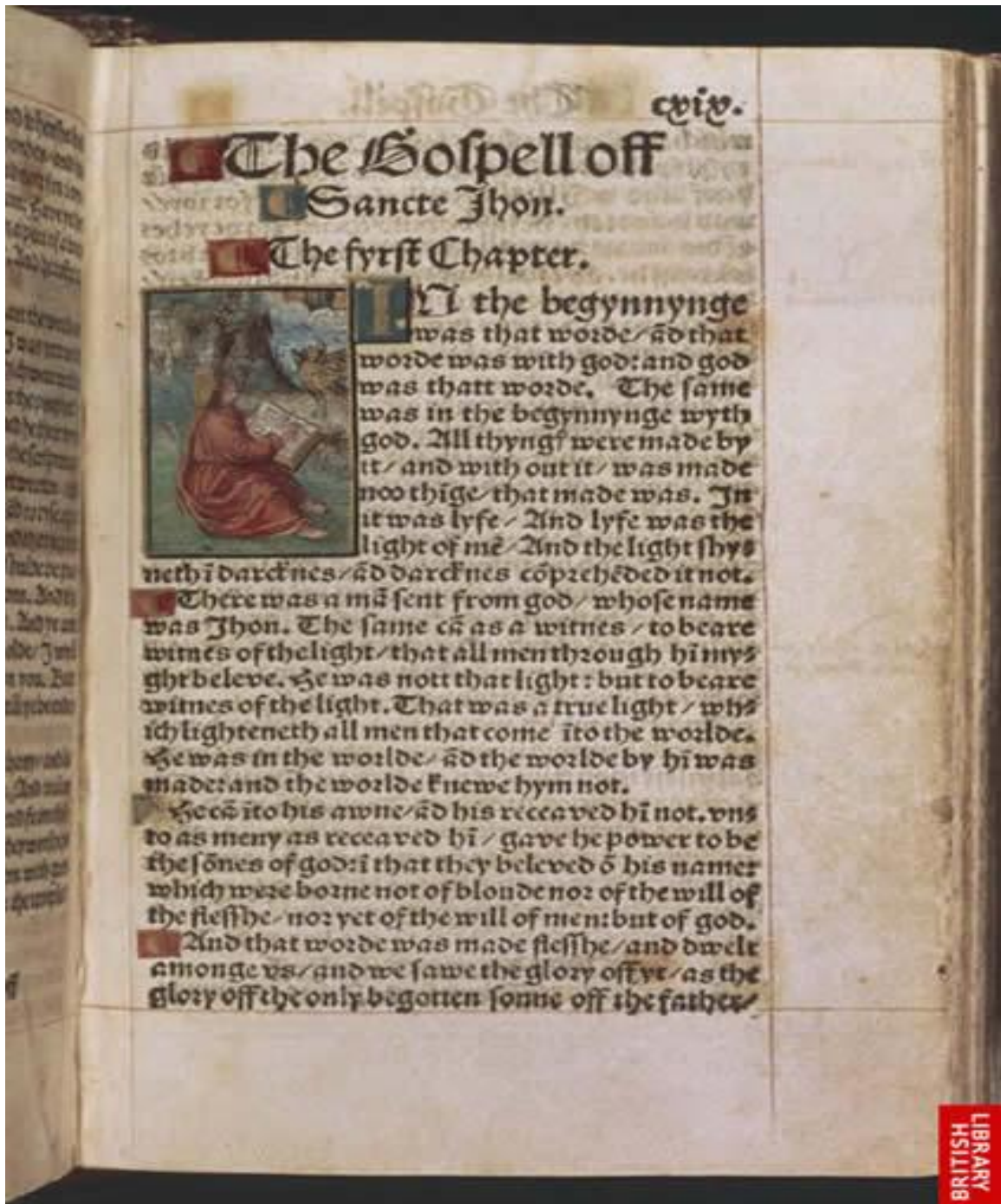
ii) Anchored in the Word

In 1523, Tyndale moved to London with the intention of translating the New Testament into English, an act that was strictly forbidden. He passionately believed that the Bible should determine the practice and doctrine of the Church and that people should be able to read the Bible in their own language. Tyndale was setting himself against the established Church in England as these sorts of ideas were closely associated with Martin Luther and other controversial Protestant religious reformers.

In 1524, Tyndale left England for Germany with the aid of London merchants. He hoped to continue his translation work in greater safety and sought out the help of Martin Luther at Wittenberg. Just one year after his English New Testament was completed and printed in Cologne

in 1525, copies were being smuggled into England – the first ever Bibles written in the English vernacular. (Reference: BBC)

From the Archives of the British Library:



“I am afraid no one can give you an exact number for the English translations and paraphrases of the Bible printed since Tyndale's New Testament of 1526. In part this is due to the difficulty of determining what should be defined as a new translation as opposed to a correction or a revision of an existing translation. There is the additional question of how we should count translations that include not a complete Bible or Testament, but just a group of books or even a single book. And then, of course, there is the difficulty of sheer numbers. With all

these caveats in mind, the number of printed English translations and paraphrases of the Bible, whether complete or not, is about 900.” (*American Bible Society, 2009*)

Tyndale understood the critical importance of the Word of God for our individual journeys as well as that of the Church. **His life was anchored in the Word** and he **chose** to share his understanding and skill so that others could partake of the Word themselves. In imagining the multitudes who have been able to read the Word of God in all these various English translations inspired by Tyndale – to God be the glory!

iii) Perseverance

Tyndale’s work was denounced by authorities of the Roman Catholic Church and Tyndale himself was accused of heresy. He went into hiding and **persevered in his calling - choosing** to begin work on a translation of the Old Testament directly from Hebrew into English. The emissaries of the King Henry VIII and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey were unable to track him down and the location of Tyndale’s hiding place remains a mystery to this day. Soon afterwards Tyndale was betrayed by his friend Henry Phillips. He was arrested for heresy by imperial authorities and imprisoned for over 500 days in Vilvoorde Castle. On 6 October 1536, Tyndale was tried and convicted of heresy and treason and put to death by being strangled and burned at the stake. By this time several thousand copies of his New Testament had been printed. (*BBC*)

I have used a word pointedly and repeatedly in describing William Tyndale’s remarkable Christian witness – **chose. Agape, the great love of God, is revealed in every moment and situation by the opportunity for choice that God gives us.** Tyndale chose to make himself fully available to God, he chose to anchor his life’s work in God’s Word calling others to do the same, and he chose to persevere to the end knowing it would cost him his life.

Brothers and sisters, in answering the call coming from the burgeoning Papine University Town for the Christian community to respond to ever increasing spiritual and social needs of students, staff and residents, are we making these kinds of choices individually and communally?

“The Church is the one institution that exists for those outside it.” (Tyndale)

To what extent are we truly available, individually and communally as ATG for God?

Are we open to doing new things in this precious corner of the vineyard – especially as the call may beckon us outside our comfort zones?

Are our choices truthfully anchored in the Word of God and in prayer?

Are we willing to persevere if it will cost us, demand of us to lay down even well made plans and ambitious dreams, demand of us to lay down our lives?

What might a new level of response as community/as ATG actually look like?

Let us reflect for a moment on the challenge from **Archbishop Justin Welby**, who on taking office in Canterbury in 2013 declared his number one priority to be **the renewal of prayer and the Religious Life:**

“If we want to see things changed, it starts with prayer. It starts with a new spirit of prayer, using all the traditions, ancient and modern. When it comes, it will be linked to what has gone before, but it will look different – because it is a new renewal for new times. God’s created community is perfectly designed for its time and place. It almost always comes from below. It comes from Christians seeking Christ.”

Bishop Howard Gregory has also challenged us in creating opportunities for Mission within our local Diocese to explore small community based approaches. (Video reference, 2013)

Might a new level of response here in Papine University Town look like a home-based community established by the Anglican Togetherness Group - anchored in prayer, providing accommodation to needy students, marked by hospitality to those in and outside of the Church and committed to witness and service?

Sisters and brothers let us pray.

Let us pray that together as an expanded combined community of the Anglican Togetherness Group we can be creating and modeling the most appropriate response to the growing challenges facing us here in Papine University Town. Housing, water, transportation are all important considerations as our area expands, but let’s help to get and keep the priorities straight.

This is God’s vineyard, and what people are ultimately calling for is a real and tangible relationship with God and his Church – where our prayers and outreach meet the needs head-on in all the various situations and circumstances that surround us. Let us pray for a new level of response that will critically engage not just those whom we are called to serve, but a response that will transform us as Church in the process.

“Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.” Amen.