

# Jesus in Nazareth

Luke 4:16-30

Today we are going to look at the story of Jesus preaching in the synagogue of his home town.

We are going to do two things.

- The first is that we are going to look at what Jesus says, this remarkable message which sometimes people call the “Nazareth Manifesto”
- And the second thing we are going to do is look at how people react to Jesus, which is, as we shall see, something of a roller coaster.

Firstly though, let us look at what Jesus says.

Jesus is asked to do the reading – and it is interesting to note that the only job which we ever know of Jesus doing in a religious service is being asked to read the scriptures – that’s how important it is to read the Bible in our worship.

Jesus picks up the scripture and he reads from the prophet Isaiah, from chapter 61 of Isaiah, he reads...

***“ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor***

***He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives***

***The recovery of the sight to the blind***

***To let the oppressed go free***

***To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”***

People in Jesus' day were used to king's announcing Good News,  
But very often the Good News that kings announced was false Good News

The King, or the Emperor might have one a battle in a far off land,  
And the news would go about, the King has won a battle,  
And people would perhaps hear and think to themselves,  
All that this means is another group of poor peasants are going to be oppressed like we  
are  
It means that the people who are on top of us, who persecute us, have just go stronger,  
It's always that way, they get to gloat and cheer, whilst it is us that picks up the pieces  
This was false good news.

Or perhaps the King, and King Herod is thought to have done this,  
Would announce to his people "I have been honoured by the Emperor,  
He has given me medals and prizes, and proclaimed that I am king forever in Judea  
And we are going to have feasts to celebrate,  
What Good news this is"  
And people would think... who is going to pay for this feast, it will be us who are going to  
serve, it is us who are going to have to pay higher taxes, we are not going to be invited,  
but we will watch and hear all the stories about the wonderful things that happened at  
this feast, the feast we paid for but were not invited to.  
That was false good news.

But what Jesus does, as a King, is to announce true Good News,  
Not Good News for the rich and privileged and the powerful  
But Good News for the poor.

He says that through him the captives are to go free

When you lived in a society where there were arrests and those who didn't deserve it were put in jail,

Where the poorest people were punished, and people just assumed they deserved it,

Jesus brings a different world, I am going to release the prisoners, I am going to set them free.

And there is going to be sight for the blind,

It is interesting that when this line is read in poor countries, what they think about immediately is education – that the poorest people are going to be able to see, they are going to get access to education, proper teaching, in proper classrooms with proper course which equip them for life.

And Jesus says that he is going to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The law in Israel stated that every fifty years, everybody's debts were going to be released, all the slaves were going to be set free, and all the lands were going to be returned to those who owned them at the start of the fifty years.

Can you imagine if we brought in a law today that said next year, we are going to clear all the overdrafts, we are going to return all property to everyone who owned it fifty years ago, and everyone who fell into some form of slavery in the last fifty years is going to be set free. How do think that would go down if it was put into someone's manifesto? What labels would they be given? What names would they be called?

Well do you know, even in Israel, where this law was first given, it seems that that sceptical response was probably the response that was given, because there is no evidence that this law was ever put into practice. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that people actually celebrated the Jubilee year.

It was almost as if God is too idealistic for the real world

And so the people didn't enact the law.

The chances are that everybody loved the idea of the Jubilee year when they first heard about it, but then they began to think "this will never work", so they forgot about it.

Let me take you back to your youth...

Were you ever a young radical... were you ever someone who wanted to change the world, who campaigned for a better world, but gradually as you became older you thought "this will never work, what's the point, the winners will always win, the poorest will always lose, and the best I can do is to help out the best I can, but the world will never change."

What's interesting is that Jesus says "Yes! I have come to bring about the changes which you once dreamed of, but let go of because they were too difficult."

Jesus comes with the idealism of youth, and says, this is why I have come.

So this morning.... What change would you love to see

For prisoners?

For those lacking in education?

For those facing debt?

And what does this Gospel mean for the people of Gaza at the moment, and Israel today, and people who are being persecuted in Sudan, or women who are denied justice in Afghanistan,

And the places in our own country where there is poverty, injustice and oppression?

What change did you once dream of in our society when you were young,

But gave up on because it seemed too impossible?

This morning, might we ask the Spirit of God to show us how we might move in the direction of the change we once dreamed of, that we ourselves would be the change we want to see in the world.

So that is the Nazareth Manifesto

The passion of God for justice, for change, for Good News to be given to the poor.

## The Roller Coaster

Now, what are we going to say about the second thing that happens in this passage – the roller coaster of reactions to Jesus preaching like this.

You see, at this point, Jesus is not living in Nazareth, he is living in Capernaum, the local rival village down the road – which is interesting in and of itself – like Jesus was brought up in Weem and decided to live in Dull, or was brought up in Aberfeldy but decided to live in Pitlochry.

So when he comes to his people, there is an air of expectancy, there is a sense that people want this local guy made good to acknowledge them, to say that they had a part in his greatness, to remember where he came from, to butter them up a little bit, to share in a bit of nostalgia.

And at first, it seems that Jesus might do this.

He reads from Isaiah, and everyone is very pleased.. It tells us that in verse 22, all spoke well of Jesus.

And every other preacher would be tempted to sit down at this point, but not Jesus, not Jesus because he suddenly turns on the people who are his biggest fans, he ruins the moment, by saying:

“Doubtless, you will quote to me this proverb, Doctor, Cure yourself!”

In other words, people were going to want the Doctor to cure his home town, to do extra miracles in Nazareth, to sort out everyone’s problems, and by the way, they are very entitled to want this, after all, has he not just read a lesson about the blind being healed and the prisoners being set free.

“Why not start right here?” the people ask.

But instead Jesus turns on them, and tells them stories from Elijah and Elisha of who God seemed to turn his first attention to those who were outsiders.

Just imagine the shock of how this would be...

I want you to do a little exercise of the imagination here – actually it is Neil who has suggested this, so for what is about to happen, he can get the blame...

But imagine, that I, Tommy Pringle, resident of Dull, a man who has grown up in this area, were to stand in Church this morning and say,

“Not only am I going to read the sermon this morning,

But I am going to heal the sick

I am going to set the prisoners free

I am going to proclaim the year of God’s Jubilee”.

How would you feel about that?

You would probably be thinking – “Isn’t this Tommy, the son of Margaret and William, we remember him when he grew up in Moness Crescent”, isn’t this amazing, he’s going to change the world.

And then how would you feel if I turned round and said,

“Actually I am not going to do anything amazing here, because God always prefers to start helping those on the outside... Let me tell you about Elijah, there were loads of widows in Israel, Elijah was sent to none of them, he went to a widow in Lebanon. And how about Elisha, there lots of people with severe health conditions in Israel, but who did he help, he helped a General from the Syrian army.”

And what is interesting, is that even that is enough to send everyone into a fury,

Everyone is raging... imagine that – it is provocative what Jesus says, but is it enough to send everyone into a rage, all that would happen if I preached a bad sermon here would be that you would maybe avoid eye contact at the door, but in Jesus home village they want to kill him – these are people who are very volatile, very prone to violence, very insecure... maybe they are people who have been wrecked by years and years of being outsiders, and now they at last have a chance of putting their name on the map, their favourite son has turned on them. There is a lot of inner rage, and Jesus instead of calming it, provokes it and brings it to the surface.

The only thing that people can think to do with all this pain and all this fury is to try and scapegoat it onto Jesus, to somehow take the blame for all the pain that they feel,

So they run him to the edge of town, they pushed him up to the equivalent of Weem rock, and they want to hurl him off a cliff,

Instead though, Jesus seems to have some way of avoiding the fury of the crowd and walks calmly through their midst....

And that, is the end of the gospel story for today...

What do we make of that?

What is that story telling us?

Let's have a think about this story, for a moment of silence, and think, what is this saying to us?

Here's a possible way to think of this...

Think back to the time that you were a radical... any of you, did you get involved in a group which wanted to change the world, or wanted to make the world a better place?

What were the other members of the group like?

Did any of them have any issues? Were some of them a little bit angry and off-putting to be around?

You see, what is happening is that systems which are unjust start to make unjust people,

It's called the bicycle effect – where the top man kicks the middle man, and then the middle man kicks the man who is on the bottom, and the one who is at the bottom gets the most amount of kicks.

This story is asking us to think how systems corrupt us,

These are people who have been damaged by the system.

The system damages us, it makes is immune, and apathetic, and distances us from those who are different from us.

And very often the way we deal with that anger is to shoot the messenger, to get rid of the discomfort, to deal with our anger by finding innocent scapegoats and victims.

Hears the rub... one day, three years after this story, Jesus was the scapegoat again, this time in Jerusalem, not in Nazareth,

And this time he didn't walk through the crowd, he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross.

And in doing this, he made the change that we all need

He changed the heart

He took our anger and he forgave it

He took our wounds and he healed them

He took our smouldering resentments and lifted them away from us

By his stripes we were healed

He took our sins and forgave them,

Because what Jesus is about,

Is healing the system

And healing the people in the system

He wants to mend the system and mend the soul.

So this morning also, think of the hurts you carry,

Think of the resentments,

Think of the disappointments and the lack of recognition

Think about how those who have hurt you.

And ask for Jesus to heal you,

And having healed you

To make you ready to work for the future which you have dreamed of,

To heal you, and help you to heal the world.



This is what we are called towards

May God's Spirit anoint us, and make us ready for the task,

AMEN