

The Freedom Jesus brings, **Luke 4:14-30**, January 24th 2022.
Third Sunday of Epiphany.

The Freedom Jesus brings

Jesus has been baptized, he has gone into the wilderness where he was tempted, and afterwards he begins preaching, teaching, healing, casting out demons etc within the Galilee region.

‘News about him spread through the whole countryside’ we heard... and ‘everyone praised him.’ He is known. He is popular.

Jesus comes home. What will he say people wonder? What will he do? What do the people *want him* to do or say? Maybe the gathering in the synagogue was larger than normal? Maybe the mayor and local journalists would have been there? Will he preach against Rome? Will he do a mighty miracle?

Jesus is given the scroll. He chooses the place in Isaiah 61 and he reads out, what has become known as **the Nazareth Manifesto**.

To remind us, we use a more literal reading of the Greek:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
For he has anointed me,
To bring good news to the poor,
He has sent forth, me
To proclaim for the captives, release.
And to the blind, sight;
To send forth the oppressed in release;
To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

The Holy Spirit

Right from the start Luke is clear, that Jesus ministry will show the presence and power of the Spirit. We have seen the Spirit’s activity at his baptism, in the temptation and of course, at his conception. When Jesus was baptized: ‘the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.’ Then at the start of chapter 4 : ‘Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert.’ Then, after the temptations, ‘Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.’ Why is Jesus anointed? He now declares the meaning of the Spirit’s ministry in his life. He says, it is not for his own personal encouragement.

It is for the work of God.

It is for ‘the purpose of bringing good news to the poor, to bring release to those imprisoned or oppressed, to bring sight to the blind, and to proclaim that the favour of God has come.

Good news to the Poor.

‘Who are the poor?’ We will spend a few minutes here. Sometimes in Isaiah and other places, the poor, refers to Israel as she suffers and is in need as a people. In the general, however, in OT use, the poor are those who are “economically weak and vulnerable, but who live in utter dependence upon God and look to him for help, ” (Vinoth Ramachandra, Mission, Bible Speaks Today, p.159.

In Luke, the word for the poor, is often used as a collective term for all who are disadvantaged.

When he gives a list of those who suffer, he puts the poor at the start or at the end...As David Bosch says: “All who experience misery are, [for Luke], in some very real sense, the poor. This is particularly true of those who are sick.” (Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.99). In our western settings, where we have things in place to assist us when we are sick, like government support, in those days, as is common across much of the current two-thirds world, to be sick, you have no income.

However, this is more than being, economically destitute. Joel Green, a NT scholar, points out, that this is also about social standing in a community. A person's social standing did not only rely on someone's economic status. A person could be poor, economically, but still hold high social status. A contemporary example, may be Gandhi - as a man he was poor, yet in social terms, he was not – he was very highly regarded.

In the days of Jesus, human worth was determined a lot by – education, your gender, your occupation, your family connections, your ethnicity, your religious purity and activities – these, whether you had high income or not – decided if you had status, worth in the culture. So, to hear the word 'poor', pointed to low status, not just economically destitute but also what we would call, looked down upon, devalued because of the other things, which we just mentioned.

Vinoth Ramachandra, a missiologist says, with these words, '*good news for the poor*', we learn: "**Jesus mission embraces all those who for, whatever cultural or religious reasons, are marginalized, relegated to a place outside the boundaries that hitherto define the covenant nation. He [Jesus] categorically states God's intention to break down those boundaries.**" (Vinoth Ramachandra, BST, p.160).

In the era of God's salvation, Jesus is saying, while some people may be seen as outside of God's interest or plans, God has and is providing a way for them, and for all, to belong in God's family and to experience good news and freedom. We saw that in The Beatitudes. The sayings were not - 'be this and you will be blessed'. He was telling his followers – if you *are this*, even if people are looking down on you, shaking their heads, you are *blessed* in the kingdom.

Day of Jubilee

The quotation ends with the phrase 'year of the Lord's favour'. This would have brought to mind – both in Isaiah's day, and in Jesus' day – memories of the Jubilee.

In Leviticus 25, after 49 years, there was to be a trumpet sound. 'And the Lord told Moses: "Consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you." Lev 25:10. The slaves were to be released, the debts of every poor person cancelled, land to be left unsown, and land that had been taken away / sold, to be given back to the original families to whom it was given centuries before.

When Isaiah 61 was first heard, it was directed to those who had returned from exile. They were mourning at all they had lost, in the past; how they were not free now, and their land was devastated. They were the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed.

Isaiah 61 promised a reversal, an act of grace, there would be a permanent Jubilee, Israel would recover.

So when Jesus says: with everyone's eyes fixed on him, 'today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing', he is saying now, in his ministry, has dawned God's promised era – the kingdom – and God's eschatological purpose, to bring release, and restoration for the marginalized was now being put into effect in and through Jesus. The time of the Lord's favour had come.

Release.

The marginalized, the poor, the Lord's Favour / the Jubilee.

And release.

This word release is mentioned twice. Release for the prisoners. Release for the oppressed. And in fact, the Hebrew word – we translate as Jubilee – actually means 'release. In his words, Jesus is repeatedly pointing to release, to freedom, to liberation.

What release does Jesus bring?

It is clear, in the gospel, the primary release Jesus brings, is the release from sin.

Luke quoted the words of the angels. 'Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you.' He uses the word twice more in Acts. Luke, following Paul's frequent use, points to Jesus as Saviour, salvation, and the linked

themes of repentance and forgiveness. As we have said already, the final commission, this forgiveness is offered to all sinners – to Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus is the one who can forgive sins, as he declared to the paralysed man, and he is the one who will enable our forgiveness through the cross. He sent his disciples out: “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name to all nations.” Luke 24:46-47.

This link between forgiveness and release we see in the Greek word used. The word for forgiveness and for release is the same – ‘aphesis (af-fes-is)’. This suggests Jesus ministry has eternal transformation effects, but also effects for the here and now.

Forgiveness means liberation/ release for us, personally.

We also release others, through forgiveness of them. We set people free as we lift from their shoulders, the burden of our anger, (whether rightly or wrongly deserved).

The Day of Release – the Jubilee – significantly was to be proclaimed on the Day of Atonement – on the 10th day of the 7th month.

That connection implied: a forgiven nation, not only had a restored relationship with God – her upward relationship – but this flowed outward to others: the restoration of relationships within the community, including those who had been estranged, could once again play a full part in their town, community.

Jesus ministry, had and has important personal as well as social implications.
As you are released, you forgive, release others...

Release. That Greek word – to release – can mean ‘to let go, to loose, set free, acquit, dismiss, remit.’

We see this word, also reflected in Jesus own ministry of healing and of demons being cast out. People were released physically, freed from demonic powers, and free to return to community – as illnesses like leprosy or internal bleeding had excluded them.

Jesus brings freedom is his message. This means a transformation of human life – there is forgiveness of sin, there is healing from sickness, there is the creation / re-creation / reconciliation of human community, there is release from other forms of bondage.’ It is about liberation – liberation from sin, in all its forms, and liberation to the love of God and love of neighbour.

Gentiles.

To return to that final line. When Jesus quotes Isaiah, he says ‘year of the Lord’s favour’ but he does not state, the next line ‘the day of the vengeance of our God’. Isaiah promised a time when the foreigners – the Gentiles – who dominated them, would be defeated and dominated by Israel. Yes Jesus omits to mention this judgement. This suggests an openness to the Gentiles, which is then affirmed as Jesus mentions the Syrian general Naaman who was healed, and the Gentile widow in Sidon to whom Elijah was sent. This time of the Lord’s favour benefits the Gentiles too. We hear, these international purposes of God, in his final commission: **“and repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name to *all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem.”**

Those examples of Elijah and Elisha - Jesus quotes them – they show the Gentile received God’s blessings; they show ‘outsiders’ received God’s favour; and it was a sign of judgement for those who would not accept what God was doing or asking.

These words are the final straw for the listeners. It was a Sabbath, and they were forbidden by the Romans, to carry out a death penalty. Yet they still try to kill Jesus, showing how angry they were at all Jesus has said. The Nazareth Manifesto, welcomed by some, has created great opposition – a theme which of course, will continue throughout Jesus ministry.

Practical Outworkings

The Nazareth Manifesto creates a shape for the Church. This is what Jesus came to do. At the start of Acts, Luke says the Gospel was about all Jesus 'began to do and teach' suggesting, that through the Church Jesus still seeks, to teach and do. He continues to work out the Nazareth Manifesto.

How can we become involved in the master's work.

How can we bring good news of the kingdom to the poor – not just the economically destitute or struggling, but also to the marginalized, rejected, devalued, those who have no status in our society. Who are those in misery in our world, in our nation, in our city?

How can we help bring the message of forgiveness to all nations? As I have shared, I am asking that our global prayer focus this year, will use materials from Joshua Project, which researches and gathers information on the unreached and barely reached people and tribal groups in our world. One quarter of the world has little or no chance to hear the good news. One way we begin to play our part is to intercede for a faster breakthrough of the gospel, for people to go to these groups, etc.

Who do we need to release – to forgive?

How can we help the release that Jesus demonstrated be shared by others? Release from oppression, freedom from captivity? What imprisons people today? What oppresses them? Jesus tackles sickness and demonic oppression which are still needs for today.

There are other forms of oppression, captivity.

Consider some of these ministries.

We think of Compassion Netherlands – through child sponsorship, families and communities benefit through education and projects. *Compassion International defines its objective as:* exists as a Christian child advocacy ministry that releases children from spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty.

International Justice Mission – IJM – a Christian human rights organization – who are involved in helping, those individuals in areas of the world where the legal system is corrupt or failing, where there is no protection from the mechanisms of justice, policing, law, that we take for granted.

IJM's mission, as they say: is to **protect people in poverty from violence by rescuing victims**, bringing criminals to justice, restoring survivors to safety and strength, and helping local law enforcement build a safe future that lasts. To free the captives.

Jorin's work in Lebanon we have heard about: the good news has come to people, but there is more release to be received within lives; and through her training of people in trauma counseling, more can experience the freedom Christ offers, in the dark pain of the past.

In the UK, there is a wonderful Christian charity called Christians Against Poverty – which seeks to help people caught in deep life destroying debt, to have help, to be rebuilt, to become released.

In that synagogue, Jesus proclaimed – that he brings freedom, in the eternal and in the here and now. The kingdom breaks in.

How can you be involved in his Nazareth manifesto?

Is there an area on your heart?

To give to? To pray for? To go to? Many Christian organizations run what is called short term missions – 2, 3 or 4 weeks. Can you give time this summer or this year to go and give, instead of perhaps going to a conference or camp?

If you read through the following verses of the gospel, you come across Luke 5, Jesus calls his first disciples, Andrew Peter, James John and then a bit later Matthew.

He has a manifesto – a plan – and he now calls people to get involved in making it happen...
and he still does today...

and we are to do this all anointed with the same Spirit that rested upon Jesus as he sat in that synagogue.

His Spirit is upon us, for he has anointed us to preach good news to the poor, he has sent us to proclaim freedom to the captives, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim to all the year of the Lord's favour.

Shall we pray...

God of all mercy,
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
and freedom to the oppressed:

anoint us with your Holy Spirit
and set all your people free
to praise you in Christ our Lord.

In the name of your Son.