

## **JESUS' MANIFESTO**    Luke 4:14-30

Jesus returned to his home-town, Nazareth, after being in the desert coming to grips with his own temptations. It seems that his public ministry begins as he speaks in his home synagogue. It was Jesus' custom to attend 'church' and he assumes his right as an adult male Jew and stands up to read. Jesus read from the Scriptures and took as his homily theme the words from Isaiah 61: 1-2 with a couple of changes.

'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 release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
and let the oppressed go free  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Jesus added one thing and omitted another – he added 'the recovery of sight to the blind' and omitted 'and the day of God's vengeance'. Some think that Jesus stopped where he did to emphasise his servant role. He did not come first as a conquering king but as a suffering servant offering grace and mercy. The section about vengeance or judgement may refer to Christ's return.

Let's look a little more deeply – Jesus is Spirit filled; note, he is not exhibiting unusual behaviour but is doing what he would normally do. I conclude that God is at God's most powerful when we are going about our daily tasks and, at the same time, being fully available to him. We all need to be actively engaged with God's living Spirit here on earth and it simply happens as we use our wills and our hearts to be in tune with his.

These verses are Jesus' manifesto or public declaration of intention. He is the one sent to bring glad news to the poor, freedom to those who are tied up – literally or in spirit - sight where it is hard or impossible to see and release to those who are incarcerated – in the prisons of their own or others making.

Jesus is reading from the scroll which carries the words from the ancient prophet. Our OT reading today is about how the Jews became 'people of the book or scroll'. Our Psalm speaks of the Bible which 'revives the soul... makes the simple wise, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes and endures forever.' I remember going to a synagogue where a scroll was read. The reader used a silver pointer to indicate the position of the text – it was sacred and should not be touched. On the top of the scroll were silver bells which softly rang as the scroll was read – an indication that there is great pleasure in hearing and following. Both Nehemiah and Jesus are concerned with bringing life to their communities – Nehemiah through the reading and understanding of the Torah, and Jesus, by bringing the good news of the Torah to the 'here and now'.

Then the bombshell. Jesus tells the congregation that the 'me' in the reading is him! Initially the response of the Nazarenes is favourable and they are

amazed at his gracious words. With local village pride they begin to claim him for themselves, 'This is Joseph's son, isn't it – the one we've known since he was a kid.' They place him in a box with which they are comfortable – 'local boy making good'. Sure, Jesus is Joseph's son, but he is God's son. Little wonder that later Jesus asked his followers, 'Who does everyone say that I am.' An insightful answer is demanded and Peter gives it when he replies, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.'

No one Gospel writer records what else Jesus said in his homily that day other than his rebuke of the congregation. Fair go; but he won't allow the people to stay in their narrowness. He says, 'I guess you'll quote the old proverb, 'Physician heal yourself. Do here in your own town what you did before in Capernaum.' In other words, 'Be *our* local prophet. Surely we have first claim on you.' Nothing has changed – we don't want any one else to snatch the glory from this town; we're a 'can-do' community.' Why is it that 'prophets are never welcome in their own town'? We're prepared to bask in another's glory as it reflects well on us, but not with prophets who are likely to say anything!

Then Jesus starts to quote Scripture at them – what a cheek! He talks about Elijah and his heir, Elisha: both exercised significant ministry to outsiders. Elijah was sent to bring relief to a widow at Zaraphath in a drought – a woman! Elisha did not cleanse any lepers only the Syrian general, Naaman. Jesus is simply following their example by preaching, as it were, to the unconverted.

Enough of this – this is over the top, we can't have this sort of person here. So the ordinary Nazarenes boiled over and dragged him out of town intending to throw him over a cliff. Jesus passed through their midst. How awful to have the Messiah right there only to see him slip through the knot. I think that Jesus felt trapped by the narrowness he sensed within his own neighbours.

Jesus made explicit the claim that he was the one to re-shape the community of God, to re-embrace the excluded, the voiceless and the deprived by placing them all at its heart and centre. The good news of our acceptance of God's invitation to be drawn into his hospitality, is to acknowledge that God is totally inclusive – no one is excluded. We are to be working models of these ideals. We are not only to hear the words but fulfill them by living out this manifesto - we are here on this earth to worship God and to set others free so that 'our living will not be in vain.' May it be so, for his name's sake. AMEN



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