

Reflection for Bible Sunday 26 October. Luke 4: 16-24

Jesus has begun His ministry on earth. He has been baptised by John in the river Jordan. He has spent time in the wilderness wrestling with the future. Now, in the company of those he has already gathered around Him, He returns to His hometown of Nazareth. On the Sabbath they go to the synagogue as would have been the custom. Jesus is asked to read from the scriptures. This would not be unusual, Jesus as a well-known person would have been asked as a matter of courtesy. Luke tells us that the scroll was given to Him. It was not a matter of choice, Jesus was given the scroll of the book of Isaiah; He begins to read:

“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, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

So far so good: Jesus then begins to speak to them, here again this would have been normal but what He says is far from normal! “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

At first they are impressed, but gradually they begin to realise just what Jesus is saying, the Scripture has been fulfilled here and now, these words of the prophet Isaiah are not just a hope but are to become reality. ‘Hang on a minute we know who you are - you are Joseph’s son, whatever are you claiming for yourself? Why not do some of those things you did in Capernaum.’ Effectively saying, show us a trick, do a bit of magic for us. Jesus responds by saying “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown”. He says more which further enrages them, but you will have to read on to find out what this is.

The reluctance of some to hear and accept Jesus’ word continues through the ages. Some are willing to listen and feel the warmth of God’s love, while others shrug their shoulders and continue on their way.

The people gathered in that synagogue in Nazareth hear a familiar passage from Isaiah, a passage that they may have heard many times, but today it takes on a new significance as it is read by Jesus. We too may read passages from the Bible many times through our lives then suddenly a familiar passage bounces out with words and sentiments which fit the circumstances of the time. This is why the Bible is a living thing, not static, not simply words from long ago. On this Bible Sunday we give thanks for this living word that has the power to stop us in our tracks and make us think again. The words of Isaiah read by Jesus in that synagogue so long ago are still relevant to us today:

“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, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

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