

Epiphany 3 - 26th January 2025

Luke 4 :14-21 - The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

A Reflection by Julie Tate

May I speak to the glory of God , Father Son and Holy Spirit

Can you believe that we're coming up to nearly 5 years since the first lockdown, March 2020. It's quite hard to imagine those hard times when we were so cut off. Can you remember how you filled those long days? I remember making a lot of cheese scones, spring cleaning the house, led a Bible Study and I even resorted to doing jigsaws, which I really dislike!

But one of the main things I spent hours doing was researching my family tree. Very compulsive and fascinating . The result is found on this scroll – please ask if you would like to have a look later – but I appreciate that what proved to be really interesting for me might be very boring for you !

This explains why one of my favourite TV programmes is 'Who do you think you are?' (Having once made a fascinating discovery about my great grandfather in the National Archives library I now understand why this programme was once dubbed by a teenager as 'Just old people crying in libraries')

I love seeing how celebrities react to finding out that their ancestors were once in the poor house (quite a few of them), in similar professions or sometimes prisoners. We all have a desire to understand more about our identity – Who do we think we are?

There are various ways we can ask this question – (*deep and meaningful*) Who do you think you are? (*sarcastic*) Who do you think you are ?

And you can imagine this is how many of the listeners would have responded to Jesus when he went to his local synagogue, read from Isaiah and basically said it was about him. Just who does he think he is? He's no better than he ought to be! Isn't he just Joseph the carpenter's son? Oh how the tongues would have wagged in Nazareth that Sabbath!

Jesus read from Isaiah 61 which was interpreted as a reference to the Old Testament practice of having a Jubilee year every 50 years. It was a year in which all loans and debts were wiped out- everyone got a clean slate and a new start.

We can imagine a hometown congregation filled with all the characters of the village — rich and poor; seeing and blind; oppressed and oppressor, wondering what this liberation looked like for them?

In many ways this incident also shows us that Jesus himself was also working out more about who he was and what his mission was going to entail.

Think about what had happened for Jesus up to this point. He had been baptized and heard a voice say. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Then he went to the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted.

Those two experiences are images of love and suffering. Love and suffering are the two great teachers in all our lives. They are the two things that have the power to get our attention, make us a bit more self-reflective, and change our lives. So on that Sabbath both love and suffering had been doing their work on Jesus.

Jesus had been discerning what mattered and what his Father was expecting of him. By saying that he was fulfilling this prophecy it meant that he was claiming God’s right to forgive sins and to set people free from the oppression of sin and guilt.

The people in Galilee had an expectation of what the Messiah would be. They expected him to be a military ruler who would drive out the Romans and restore Israel to their glory days. They did not expect a Messiah who would urge them to care for those whom they considered to be unclean—the poor, the sick, the sinful.

So here was Jesus, a simple, common, local man who was saying such profound things - things that some of them didn’t want to hear, for he exposed the darkness of their souls.

That darkness included the view that they were “holier than thou”. They thought that Jesus should save his miracles and teachings for them, instead of including people they regarded as inferior; namely, the Gentiles and others who were rejected by society.

But what they got was someone who was far from their expectations - a simple, common man from an ordinary background who would do extraordinary things such as heal the sick, cure the lame, save sinners and associate with outcasts such as adulterers, lepers and tax collectors. They did not realize that in fact they were the ones who needed healing and saving.

When someone is different or doesn’t meet our expectations, how do we treat them? Do we accept them for who they are, or do we reject them because they are different or because they don’t belong?

Jesus' listeners did not realize something that perhaps we fail to realise today. The church is not an exclusive club - rather it is a place where Christ is proclaimed and where we confront ourselves. We have to realize that we are not who we think we are, but instead we are sinners who have been saved by a God who sent his son to die for us.

And as Jesus' representatives, we are supposed to do exactly what he did. Proclaim the good news of God's love so that people who are still captives, prisoners of sin and guilt can be set free. Yes, Jesus gave physical sight to the blind, but the miracles he performed were signs that pointed to spiritual truths.

So in fact the Spirit of the Lord is actually on us today because we are anointed to proclaim good news to all and to set them free. We are all called to share in his ministry of love, forgiveness, freedom and reconciliation.

The good news that Jesus proclaims, and thus the good news that Christians proclaim, must be good news to the poor, both economically and spiritually, and to the marginalized of our society.

So today is the day. And what we do or do not do today makes a difference for the lives of our children and grandchildren, the life of the word, and what tomorrow looks like.

Today is the day to love, today is the day to tell the truth, today is the day to forgive, today is the day to end racism, today is the day to feed the hungry, today is the day to reconcile and make peace.

The light of Christ that resides in us should attract others to us. We need to be the most positive people we possibly can be, and we need to see opportunity in the midst of life's challenges.

And remember we do not do this in our own strength but rather through the power of God's Holy Spirit that resides in us.

Throughout his ministry people were constantly trying to figure out who Jesus was. Even Jesus himself asked his disciples the question, "Who do people say that I am?"

But he knew exactly who was, God's son, the beloved sent to proclaim the good news of salvation to all people

And so who do you say you are?

In Ephesians Paul states , *“We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us.”* We matter to God.

And in Acts it says *“For in Jesus we live and move and have our being.”* As Christians our identities are completely wrapped up in Christ. We are loved and forgiven. How reassuring and amazing is that?