

GPP Reflection for 17 November 2019

Congregational Story Time: Jesus reads the scroll in the synagogue Luke 4: 14 - 21

Readings: Isaiah 61: 1-3, 11 Isaiah 65: 17-18, 22- 23 Luke 4: 14 – 21
Good News Bible

Before the Reflection Matawhero Sing: Be still for the presence of the Lord

St Andrew's Sing: God whose almighty word

Reflection: WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

- *Jesus seen through the eyes and order of Luke (and Isaiah)*
- *God's new creation: a commonwealth of justice, peace, joy, blessing, life (Is. 65: 17- 18, 21-22)*
- *Following Jesus, with order, purpose and joy*
- "come change our love from a spark to a flame"

The Good News we have to share is that God's new world, God's new creation, God's kingdom is a commonwealth of justice, peace, joy, blessing and abundant life for everyone. Isaiah tells about a time when someone will be sent to bring good news to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, announce release to the captives and freedom to those in prison. Jesus read those words in the synagogue and surprised everyone there when he said *the Spirit of the Lord is upon me and this passage of Scripture is made real in me.* We see that kind of life, that kingdom of God, supremely put into practice in the life of Jesus.

In this parish we generally follow the lectionary readings for deciding what will be the focus for our readings and reflection and worship each Sunday. The lectionary is put together by a group of international Biblical scholars who relied on the inspiration of God to work out how to ensure that at least some of each book of the Bible is read in churches over a three year cycle. Each year one of the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke becomes the focus for telling the story of Jesus, and readings from the gospel of John are sprinkled through all three years. The Psalms are also sprinkled throughout the three years but most other books of the Bible are allocated to one of the years. This year, in the lectionary cycle, the main gospel focus has been on Luke, with some exploration into John's Gospel as well. We have worked our way through the Gospel of Luke, seeing how Luke describes the ministry of Jesus and exploring that version of the Gospel Story. We have also explored Hebrews and some of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Timothy and the letters to the Thessalonians, and others as well as Acts and Exodus, 2 Kings, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas, begins a new church year and a new cycle of the lectionary readings. So before we leave Luke and move to

a focus on Matthew for the next year, I want to invite you to an overview of Luke's Gospel and the particular way in which he tells the story of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel starts with linking Jesus with his Jewish ancestors and later focuses on the teaching ministry of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is all about action and has Jesus hurrying from place to place and showing his authority by what he did rather than what he taught. Luke, on the other hand, presents Jesus as the Saviour of Israel and of all people. This Gospel shows Jesus' concern for all kinds of people and provides stories not found anywhere else – including about Jesus healing a widow's son, (Luke 7), the women who followed Jesus and looked after him (ch 8), a village in Samaria that would not receive Jesus (ch 9), Jesus sending out the 72 (ch 10), Jesus visiting Martha and Mary (ch 10) the healing of a crippled woman on the Sabbath (ch 13), a sick man being healed (Ch 14), Jesus healing ten men with leprosy (ch 17), and the story of Zaccheus (ch 19) as well as many parables that do not appear elsewhere – like The Good Samaritan, the rich fool, watchful servants, the unfruitful fig tree, the lost coin, the prodigal sons, the shrewd manager, the rich man and Lazarus, the widow and the judge, and the Pharisee and the tax collector. Each of those stories emphasises the caring, insight and welcome of Jesus for those who lived God's way.

Right near the beginning of Luke, after the birth stories and the temptation of Jesus in the desert, we find in chapter 4 that *Jesus returned to Galilee and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all that territory. He taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone – until he went back to the town where he had grown up and everyone knew him: Nazareth. Jesus went to the synagogue as usual on the Sabbath. The custom was that any adult male could read from the scriptural scrolls and Jesus offered to do that. The set reading for that day was from Isaiah 61. Jesus unrolled the scroll and read from it The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. But Jesus did not go back to where he had been sitting previously. He sat down in the place where the rabbis would sit – to teach the people. All the people had their eyes fixed on him. They were keen to hear what he had to say. Jesus began by declaring This passage of scripture has come true today as you heard it being read. In other words – I am the one sent by God, filled with the Spirit of God, who brings good news to all people. At this some of the congregation began to mutter – Isn't this the son of Joseph? In other words, they were saying who does he think he is claiming that God's spirit is in him and he will do all these wonderful things? He's one of us. He grew up here. We've known him since he was a child. Jesus talked a bit more and the crowd became angrier. Jesus said to them a prophet is never welcome in his home town - well you can imagine that would rile then up a bit. He was now claiming to be a prophet. Then Jesus went on to talk about how the Spirit of God had in the past sent prophets to people outside Israel – Elijah with the widow of Zarephath in the territory of Sidon, and Elisha healing the Syrian army captain of his leprosy when there were plenty of lepers in Israel. By the*

time we get to v.28 of Luke chapter 4, we read this *When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with anger. They rose up, dragged Jesus out of the town, and took him to the top of the hill on which their town was built. They meant to throw him over the cliff, but he walked through the middle of the crowd and went his way.*

Quite a story – but what was really happening here? Jesus was declaring his manifesto – his declaration of intent. He was going to let the Spirit of God work through him so that the healing and wholeness God wanted, the new creation, the kingdom of God, the shalom of God would come on earth. This was Jesus declaring the purpose of his ministry – and he chose to do that in his home town. Luke makes this the centre point – setting the scene for the way in which Jesus will carry out his ministry, based on the scriptural tradition, steeped in the rituals of Israel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, but connecting with all kinds of people in the power and love of God. Luke's description of Jesus' ministry is very ordered- he has Jesus moving between Galilee and Jerusalem several times but stopping in many towns along the way – and reaching out to people who needed to know good news, who needed healing and freedom, whether they were from the house of Israel or not. Jesus travelled with order, purpose and joy – and trained his disciples to do that too.

But let me take you back to the question of *what is the good news?* For many people and churches the good news is defined as a matter of personal salvation in order to get to heaven; and there is an expectation that preachers will give an explanation and an exhortation every Sunday for individuals to acknowledge they are sinners and they need to repent from their sin to get to heaven. You won't hear me using that kind of language because I do not believe that is what Jesus' good news was about. Jesus' message was about transformation in this world and the Kingdom of God on earth – the shalom of God. Shalom means peace and healing and wholeness – deep inner peace and healing. Shalom is the root word of salvation and means becoming whole, being healed. The biblical understandings of salvation are focused on this world, not the next. Yes I believe that God's love surrounds us in this world and the next. *Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death* - but the healing and transformation God offers us is for the depths of our souls now, individually and in community. The Biblical meaning of salvation includes light in our darkness, sight in the sense of insight and inspiration, enlightenment, a relationship with God, growing in Christ. Ancient Israel's story is about the creation of a new people, a nation, a community. Salvation is about life together. Salvation is about peace and justice within community and beyond community. The Good News of Jesus is that salvation is about life with God, life in the presence of God now and forever. The Good News is that we can be part of God's community here and now. We can follow Jesus, with order, purpose and joy – with resolve and commitment to live God's way.

I wrote the outline for this reflection (and chose the music the choir would sing after this) before we knew about the dreadful fires in Australia. The refrain in the lovely song, *Beauty for brokenness*, asks that we may live the way of God,

the way of Shalom and do that with passion and enthusiasm, using the words '*come, change our love from a spark to a flame*'. Sparks that burst into flames have acquired a sinister meaning in New South Wales and Queensland. We certainly do not want real sparks to burst into any more flames. But this is metaphorical language and is about us committing ourselves to live God's way with enthusiasm – not half heartedly but with our whole being.

Jesus declared his manifesto whole heartedly and bravely – in his home town. He declared what he intended to do through the power of the Spirit of God. After that he called the disciples to work with him, to learn about that spirit life and to live it enthusiastically. God will inspire each one of us to live that life of shalom, in peace and with deep healing. That is the Good News we have to share.

May you be inspired by God's Spirit, may you have a deep sense of peace and inner healing. The love of God surrounds you. The Good News is in you. God bless you. Amen.

Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah and said "The Spirit of God is making this come true in me".