

Luke's Distinctive Gospel. Luke 4: 14-30 (Sunday 20 September 2020)

It's great to welcome you wherever you are listening to our service of worship from Christ Church Purley.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Lisa the curate at Christ Church, newly ordained yesterday and as someone who used to work for a multinational food business and also as a teacher, you might ask *why* am I here in this role?

Why indeed? I wasn't brought up as a Christian. I grew up in a very happy home but tragedy struck when my father died. I, the final year undergrad with a degree more or less in the bag and a career ahead of me, was to be found slumped down between the cars at the hospital car park crying out that day, 'There has to be more to life than this!'

Some years later I went on a course at the local church, looking for answers to my questions about the future and if there was any certainty for hope.

I felt like I was surrounded by people all asking questions.

About week six and I distinctly remember wrestling with my own big question after the session. As I drove home that night, I heard an audible voice, 'Lisa you have been trying to improve your life with many different things but none of these are the answer.

It's me, Jesus, if you will put your hand in mine, your life will never be the same again'

Without any hesitation I replied 'Yes' and immediately the most incredible peace came over me and stayed with me and my car was filled with light. I encountered Jesus and life has never been the same since.

This is **why** I have come here – that first encounter changed my life and Jesus continues to bring me fullness of life and joy life's ups and downs and I don't want to keep this to myself.

Why Jesus came/ Luke's distinctive

The Bible reading we just heard/read is Jesus' answer to the question of *why* he came. This is the distinctive which Luke, the writer of this historical biography, wants to get across right from the outset:

To our questions: Where do I look for hope? Where do I look for certainty in these changing times and uncertain future? Jesus' declaration right here in the passage is that **HE** is your certain hope both for your circumstances and the battles you face today and for your future in this life and the life to come.

So often we say, 'I wish I could have the answer right in front of me', and Jesus answers in the equivalent of 21c neon lights and says: 'It's me, Look at me, Follow me. I am the answer, the answer comes through me!'

I know we are all kinds of people listening today. Maybe some of us are curious, just looking in, wondering if this stuff has anything to say to us.

Some of us are hurting and longing for change in our lives. Others of us really feel part of this community at Christ Church, yet we don't seem to be experiencing freedom and fullness of life. While others of you are right now living so close to God you feel he is right with you wherever you go. However you've come, I hope you will find something which encourages you.

Location of the Passage

Luke wants us to be clear from the outset of his gospel who Jesus is and why he has come.

We heard last week why Luke wrote his gospel

- he has carefully listened,
- he has asked the right questions and
- he has written down his investigations so that others might know the truth.

Then after the narrative of Jesus' birth, Luke answers the first question: Who is Jesus? He records Jesus' baptism and God's audible declaration:

This is my Son. My Son in whom I am well pleased.

Now, in the reading we just heard, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, and after that wilderness period of strengthening through trial, Luke emphasises how Jesus returns in the fullness of power of the Spirit to his home town of Nazareth.

He's already been speaking in synagogues across the region and people are remarking on his beautiful words which are touching, moving, shocking and healing people, no one knows from where he gets this extraordinary depth of wisdom.

Added

And Now Luke distinctively details Jesus' first recorded sermon:

To the question in people's hearts; people who were living with uncertainty about the future, living under imposed restrictions:

'Where is hope to be found? Certain hope that will not fail?' To these questions asked in every generation, and perhaps by some of us listening today:

Jesus sits back down and emphatically answers in an 8 Word sermon-opener. 8 Magnificent, Holy Spirit-filled Words, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. In other words, 'I am your answer'

Let's just go back to The Old Testament Scriptures Jesus read which show why this passage has become known as Jesus' Gospel Manifesto. On the scroll of the Book of Isaiah which he was handed Jesus picked out these words from the prophet:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and Recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,¹⁹
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Just 1.5 verses from Isaiah Chap 61. As we understand what Isaiah was referring to – it unlocks why Jesus selected this Scripture to explain Why he had come. Isaiah was speaking of God's Marvellous and Compassionate Laws in OT given to Moses: What people of God must observe when Enter Promised Land:

Laws Given to Protect the Poor. Provided to ensure Relief and Help – Radical Way. Every 7 yrs: All Debts to be cancelled (Read Deut 15)
Every 7 yrs: All Slaves to be Released. If you were unable to pay off debt within 7 years they would work for it. Never to last more than 7 yrs. These are God's Anti-Slavery Laws. Also, every 50 years : Law of Year of Jubilee where they would count off 7 x 7 years and every 50th year they would sound the Trumpet as the Day of Atonement throughout the land.
Set Apart that 50th Year: All Inheritance to be Returned to Family of Origin/ Land back to its Original Owners. (Remember all Israel had been given a portion of land in Canaan). It placed a check on wealthy people. Inevitably the wealthy

became the powerful. In the time of Isaiah, the people of God had lived 700 Years in Promised Land. So, there should have been 14 Trumpet Sounds. How many? None/Never/Jamais... It was simply too costly. These laws could only work in a community that Loved God with all their heart, mind and soul and loved their neighbour as themselves. Israel was not that society.

It's very significant that Jesus chose these words AND applied them to Himself. The Spirit of the Lord is on ME. To preach Good News to the Poor'. Yes, to those who are materially Poor AND to those who recognise they are emotionally and spiritually poor and in need of Hope he announces his very presence with us. He not only preaches it, he demonstrates the good news in very personal terms and many of the accounts we will unpack in this series will be Jesus' one to one presence with another person.

Luke wanted to clearly show the truth that Jesus was the fulfilment of God's plan. He had come to proclaim the Jubilee freedom we had never known. A Perpetual Jubilee.

"I have come to do for you what you would never do for each other. To CANCEL every debt that you owe to God. Jesus doesn't merely speak of forgiveness. He forgives actual people. To GIVE BACK to you the inheritance that Adam lost which was joy and life in His presence for ever and ever. The Recovery of Sight for the Blind – Yes, he has come to do miracles – in other words do only what God can do.

And then splicing in text from earlier in Isaiah: To SET You FREE from the Chains and Power of Sin and Satan.

That is the Promise of the Gospel!

When Jesus writes off all our debts, God is incurring that debt in himself and that is why Jesus went to the Cross. He bore the loss that we might be set free and to restore our inheritance which is life in the presence of God now and forever.

In the final line which Jesus reads from Isaiah, He stops half way through the verse: To Proclaim year of Lord's Favour. FULL STOP

We too ARE living in the Year of God's Favour, Jesus does not read the remainder of the verse in Isaiah which speaks of the day when He will come again in glory to judge. Though Jesus does speak of that later. We so often want judgement brought on others but we reject it for ourselves and Jesus is holding back that time when he comes again to judge all things right.

Thank God that when Jesus came the first time into the world He brought in the (*notice*) Year of the Lord's favour, this age of compassion and forgiveness. Hope IS here, Jesus' proclamation of good news is for us today to receive him as our compassionate Saviour!

Luke Added – All kinds of people

A distinctive throughout Luke's gospel is that he wants to emphasise that Jesus' invitation was for everyone... who will receive it. So Luke often focuses on the marginalised, the poor, people from every tribe and every nation. To those who might think themselves excluded, Jesus, specifically gives his welcome and his invitation.

After Jesus has made his astounding declaration that He is the one sent by God to be the transforming hope for all people, his home-town hearers at first welcome his beautiful words but quickly turn and begin muttering 'He's the carpenter's boy' 'Who does he think he is?' – they deny that His true father is God, his heavenly father. Jesus knows what they are thinking and reminds them that their ancestors also refused to believe and had likewise rejected the prophets who were God's hope-bearers in their generation.

He mentions Elijah and Elisha who, in the face of unbelief by the in-crowd, go instead to a Gentile widow and Gentile army officer who accept and receive God's freedom and blessing.

This Good News is for you, there is no one who is beyond the reach and blessing of Jesus.

The text tells us that the in-crowd, all of them, were furious and took Jesus to a cliff to stone him. At their rejection of Him, Jesus simply walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

I've been reading a book about the revival in the Hebrides, Christine Macleod, one of the many who give their testimony, speaks of wrestling with big questions and then heard God's encouragement, 'everyone that the Father has given me will come to me, and I won't turn any of them away.' She said, 'I wanted to be saved but I did not want to give all of myself to Christ. I was afraid of the consequences. At a point of desperation that I have never been able to explain. It seemed as if a cool breeze went through the room and I heard a clear voice say, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by'. It was so real I put my hand out to touch Him and said, 'Don't pass me' and He didn't! I, as it were, touched Him and He saved me in that instant. The presence of God was so real. Joy welled up within me and I knew I was His.

Today, what will you do with the declaration of Jesus Christ, that HE is the certain hope of the Gospel?

Will you let Him pass by? Or, will you do as Luke did and carefully investigate the gospel accounts? Or, today will you receive him or receive him once again and follow him?