

## Bennochy church 8th January 2017

What would an 'Isaiah 61' year look like? The prophet gives us a great vision of hope. If you are poor in spirit, what would *Good news* sound like to you? If you are broken hearted, anxious, worried, what would healing feel like, to you? If you are captive, trapped by your own demons, whatever they might be, what would it feel like to be released from that burden? To walk through an unlocked door. If you are mourning a great loss, what would it be to be comforted. Joy and gladness instead of grief. A song of praise instead of sorrow. What would that song sound like, to you?

This is a message of transformation, offered by the prophet and proclaimed by God. He will take the rubble of ruined cities, and they will be rebuilt. In the back ground to these words could be one of the great feasts days of ancient Israel, echoing away, part of Israel's collective memory, but these are poignant words, written to a people whose recent memory was one of exile and captivity in Babylon and where Jerusalem's walls still stand in ruins. This is a message of hope, written to a people now under the domination of the empire of Persia. They were literally poor and Israel's former enemies were taking great delight in harrying a defenceless community.

These great words of poetry, are in fact the reality of God's people, struggling to survive, hundreds of years before the birth

of Jesus, in God's promised land. And in the midst of their pain, God offers them these words of salvation. They will be trees planted by God. A people who will do what is right, and God will be praised.

It is no surprise to me that these same words are spoken by Jesus in the synagogue, in his home town of Nazareth. If you are going to proclaim God's message, what better words to use. If you are going to state your intention, and in effect, declare your Messiah-ship, what better prophecy to turn to than these great words of Isaiah.

I am now going to use my imagination a little bit here. In your minds picture what is going on. Jesus is here being given the position of Rabbi, a teacher, a carpenter's son, and after reading the words of Isaiah he sits down. You could have heard a pin drop. All eyes are fixed on him. Waiting for him to interpret these words of Isaiah. This is Josephs son, everyone knew him. What was he going to say? He began, "*This passage of scripture has come true today as you heard it being read.*" Does Jesus wait for a reaction? Is there a pregnant pause in proceedings? Are they trying to work out the significance of what he has just said. They seem impressed.

I don't think we should over spiritualise these words, but if Isaiah's kingdom was to come, Jesus is saying, God's kingdom is

here. Liberty, sight, freedom. These are the signs, and they begin now. Are the listeners making these connections?

It was all going so well. However, they were not so impressed, with what happened next. There is a time line issue here, because the words of Luke indicate that Jesus has already been to Capernaum and done things there, that maybe the people of Nazareth are looking for. After all, it is Jesus home town. They might want to call in a few favours. Some miracles perhaps or healings for people they knew. .

To our ears what comes next, seems so insignificant. It is just an ancient story. Now they are making connections! They liked what they heard about God's Kingdom, but it was for them and no one else. In spite of how God had acted in the ancient scriptures, they were none too pleased at what Jesus was now saying. Their anger overflowing to the point of murder. It was only an ancient story. Yet, Jesus interpretation of the prophecy, is that God's Kingdom, God's love, over flows into the gentile nations. And that is us.

The ancient message of God is not transformed, it had always been so. Even in the dim reaches of history. An ancient promise is given to Abraham, he would be the father of many nations and through him the nations of the earth would be blessed by God.

Down through the centuries, a misunderstanding took place. The people of Israel came to believe that this promise of God was for them and them alone. Hence the explosion of anger in response to the words of Jesus. It was more than a story. It pulled the rug of identity from under their feet. If they were not God's unique people. Who were they?

What enabled Jesus to proclaim such a message? I believe it was the calling of his baptism. A calling tested in the wilderness, and here, Jesus enters human history. A new kingdom has been born.

Called by God in baptism, with a message to proclaim. A new Kingdom is here. Is that not what the church is all about? is that not our message? Our identity; who we are in Jesus Christ. Our purpose; why we exist. As a sign, symbol and a foretaste of the Kingdom, here, and yet to come.

What better words could we use to proclaim of our hopes and dreams for the future.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set free the oppressed  
<sup>19</sup> and announce that the time has come  
when the Lord will save his people.” Amen.*