

Epiphany 3 – St Aidan’s & 10.30am Wesley – 27th January 2013

Theme: “The mission statement of Jesus”

Reading: Luke 4:14-21

As we come to reflect on the Gospel for today the last verse of our set Psalm, which is 19, are a beautiful ‘lead-in’.

We read in Psalm 19:14 “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Introduction

Over the past few weeks in Epiphany our readings have been a build up to the ministry of Jesus. We have had his baptism by John, followed last Sunday with the first of his signs or miracles, where Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

Now we travel with Jesus back to his home town of Nazareth where he goes into the synagogue ‘as was his custom’ and he reads from the scroll of Isaiah, specifically from chapter 61:verses 1 &2

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour... and he began by saying to them,

‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’.” (Luke 4:vss 18-19 & 21)

All three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6a and Luke 4:14-30) recount this story of Jesus teaching in the synagogue in his hometown and then being rejected after the initial welcome. However Luke’s account is both fuller and distinctive as it is at the beginning of his public ministry, following the temptations in the desert.

Fred Craddock, writing on this passage says:

‘Luke places the Nazareth visit first because it is first, not chronologically but programmatically. That is to say that this event announces who Jesus is, of what his ministry consists, what his church will be and do, and what will be the response to both Jesus and the church.’

The messianic job description, already familiar to the synagogue worshippers as messianic expectations of the Coming One, is re-interpreted before their very eyes. In a dramatic moment, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant, and sits down. We read, “The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him.” Then Jesus speaks: ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’.

Entering into the passage

Jesus makes it clear that his ministry will have 4 aspects to it:

1. Heal the broken-hearted
2. Announce the release of prisoners of war
3. Announce recovery of sight to the blind
4. Announce the acceptable year of the Lord – a time when each fifty years there was a jubilee year where debts were foregone, slaves set free, people returned home and fields were rested to re-invigorate them for future harvests. Scholars suggest that in 27/28 AD this may well have been such a year in the Jewish calendar which makes what Jesus is saying even more powerful.

Robert Parham writes on this passage from his paper “*The Agenda:8 Lessons from Luke 4*” the following:

“Jesus said the Gospel was for the poor and oppressed, speaking to those at the margins of society. Jesus was announcing that he came to liberate from real oppressive structures the marginalised – the impoverished, the war captives, the poor in health, the political prisoners. Jesus came to turn the economic structures upside down, instituting the year of Jubilee when crushing debts were forgiven and slaves were freed.”

All this is very challenging for those of us who are not amongst the poor, marginalised, oppressed or imprisoned of our society. It is threatening to contemplate the turning upside down of economic structures from which we benefit; but we need also the moral courage to listen to the intention of God for humanity as Jesus proclaims it in Luke 4.

The way in which Jesus combines the spiritual and the social/political in his teaching and ministry, beginning with this text from Isaiah 61 needs to be noted. There are many Christians that have the notion that faith, politics and economics should be kept well apart. From the outset of his ministry Jesus challenges this and makes it clear that this cannot be. All are interlinked in God's world. This is an issue that could well be further explored!!!

What about us in the Canberra Central Parish?

Sometimes we forget that we have a "vision statement" that is a guide to our ministry as a Parish. I won't ask you if you have memorised our 'vision statement' but I will read it afresh to you this morning. It says: "The Canberra Central Parish is a Christian

Community embracing members from all areas
of the Canberra region, and welcoming visitors
from across Australia and around the world."

It then goes on with a purpose statement:

"Together we seek to:

- Worship God in Spirit and in truth
- Share the good news of Jesus Christ
- Nurture children and youth as they grow in faith
- Develop and encourage programmes that enhance community and family life
- Be a focus for the development of music ministry in worship and the community

Why do I raise our mission statement today? Well I think it is good for us to reflect our mission statement in the light of Christ's mission statement. I also think it is good for us to reflect on our mission statement as we begin the year and see where our strengths and weaknesses lie and possibly look to address issues there. Certainly we are struggling in some areas with leadership of children's and youth ministry as well as encouraging family life.

With Gregor concluding his ministry term towards the end of the year we will be asked to think about the gifts that we are looking for in a future paid ministry appointment as well as how we are able to support the wider ministry areas in the life of the parish. Currently we are looking for appropriate people for the eldership role as well as the Joint Church Council and regional Presbytery membership.

Hence it is a time of challenge but also possibility as we reflect together. We need to be a people of mission and vision and we need to be thinking about the future. Parts may be difficult and a struggle but we need to ask ourselves: How can I be part of the mission of Christ in the life of the parish?

Conclusion

Showing my old Methodist tradition, from our Circuit Quarterly Meetings, the last question on the agenda, variously phrased was:

'What more can we do for the work of God here in our circuit?'

I believe the developing Men's Shed has great possibilities. This is a community outreach. I believe the strong Monday playgroup, Whippersnappers, is also an incredible outreach possibility group where we have more than 55 pre-school children with parents/caregivers involved. Certainly the Wesley Music Centre has an outreach into the community that brings in people to worship with us. In this season of Epiphany may we see God breaking into our faith community and offering hope even when sometimes we feel a little lacking in hope!!

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Amen.