

## **JESUS IMPACT ON HIS HOME TOWN** **(Luke 4:14-21)**

It is very encouraging to have so many visitors here this morning, supporting Gareth and Margaret as they bring Theo for baptism. It might seem premature at a mere twenty weeks of age to start imagining how his life will develop but I imagine his Dad and Mum have certain hopes and dreams for this young man as he grows up. They will have plans for him that he might develop physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. They might not have planned exactly what leadership role he will have in government, commerce, in the sporting arena or the arts but I imagine that they hope he will make a worthwhile contribution in some field of endeavour. In short, they hope he will make a genuine impact throughout his life.

Here at St John's in the morning service, we have just commenced a series based on the Gospel According to Luke on 'How Jesus Impacts People.' If you study the Gospels, the accounts of the life of Jesus, you cannot but be impressed with the way Jesus made a difference in the lives of people. He was not some shadowy figure, some sort of recluse who steered away from problems and difficult people. Wherever he went he engaged with people and made a lasting impact. And he wants to make a difference in our lives still today. Whoever you are this morning, whatever your reasons for gathering in this church, Jesus wants to draw near to you and make a positive difference in your life.

It is interesting that the episode in the life of Jesus which we consider this morning comes hot on the heels of his own baptism. While his baptism was different to ours, that cleansing from sin which we symbolize in Christian baptism, he chose to identify with the Jewish nation by subjecting himself to this rite, this ceremonial practice. And Luke records that immediately he came up out of the water, a voice came from heaven – "*You are my son whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" (Luke 3:22) Here was God's stamp of approval on his Son, a powerful reminder to those who were present that this was no ordinary prophet. What follows immediately is that Jesus loyalty to his Father is put to the test as he is driven into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. It's not possible for us to explore this in detail this morning, but it's very clear that what is at stake is this question of his divine sonship. Each time the Evil One comes to him he comes with this challenge – "*If you are the Son of God...*" casting doubt on that affirmation from heaven which occurred at his baptism. The great 'deceiver' who leads the whole world astray has this as one of his favourite strategies. Will Jesus show himself to be a loyal son of God, will he show himself to be worthy of that description of "the beloved Son with whom God is truly pleased?"

Well, Jesus passes the test on each occasion with flying colours, triumphing over the Satan who seeks to bring him under his power.

So is it any surprise that the words which begin our reading this morning, show how Jesus power derives from his relationship with, and his obedience to his Father. He will not betray his Father, and be seduced by the devil's schemes. Luke 4:14 simply tells us – "*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside.*" This power of course is not some personal charisma, he's not some Mel Gibson figure as we see in Brave Heart driven by a cause. If Jesus made an impact wherever he went, it clearly had something to do with this power which he heard about last week. I want you to consider this today as many people feel a great sense of powerlessness in their lives.

### **1. Jesus comes with power (v.14)**

As I read these verses I am impressed by the purpose and direction in Jesus life from the very beginning. Jesus wasn't going through some identity crisis, unsure of where he fits in the world. He has emerged from this wrestling match with Satan, and the reason he came into the world, now lies open before him. Now make no mistake, Jesus was aware of the magnitude of the task that faced him. Even though he'd survived the torrid testing over 40 days in the wilderness, this was only a temporary respite. The evil one would return of course, many times, notably in the grueling which Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. You might be wondering about these references to the Evil One, or the Devil and wonder whether the preacher has lost touch with reality.

Before we turn to a consideration of Jesus' power, we need to recognize that there is also a supernatural malevolent power at work in the world. The Bible is very explicit about this personal spiritual being and cautions us against dismissing this as some sort of fantasy. The 'Adversary' as the Bible prefers to call him, is not a second god, but one who nevertheless has remarkable powers, often working behind the scenes and through human agents, who surrender to the Lie, and promote wickedness. If you have read Scott Peck's book 'People of the Lie' you will know what I am talking about. The Bible has a number of names for this being: Satan, the devil, the father of lies. I encourage you to check out these references for yourself sometime and to treat this with all seriousness.

After the Second World War, two of the greatest skeptics and opponents of Christianity, became Christians because they could not explain what happened on any other terms. The nature of evil and wickedness unleashed in the war could only be attributed to some sort of demonic power (see Bullock '*An Essay on Tyranny.*') The first was the atheist philosopher, J.M.Joad who had spent most of his life ridiculing Christianity, and the

other was the writer W.H.Auden. It's patently obvious, to any honest person, that evil exists and that human beings are not getting better with the passage of time. We are fundamentally flawed, and dark forces are at work which defy simplistic explanations. It's no accident that the prayer after the baptism in our Anglican Services acknowledged this – *“Fight bravely under his banner against sin, the world and the devil and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end.”*

Well what about Jesus ministry being in “the power of the Holy Spirit?” The twin ideas of ‘power’ and ‘authority’ are very strong in Luke's gospel and punctuate the public ministry. Mary is told by the angel that this extraordinary pregnancy will be will be because *“the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”* As Jesus confronts the evil spirits tormenting people and casts them out, the people respond – *“With authority and power he commands the evil spirits and they obey him.”* (4:36) As the disciples go out on a mission in his name, he commissions them with these words – *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority ... to overcome all the power of the enemy...”* (10:19) And as he stands trial on trumped up charges before the High Priest, and is asked point blank if he is the Messiah, there is the theme again in his reply - *“...and you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory.”* (22:69) It's clear that Luke wants us to understand that this is not the ‘power which corrupts’ which Lord Acton spoke about but the power and authority that comes from God alone, exercised in and through the person of Jesus. As Jesus commences his ministry, it is undertaken solely in God's power and testifies to Jesus' unique relation to his Father. This is the supernatural Son, doing the work of his father.

**2. Jesus power in action** - Luke wants us to see how Jesus ministry will unfold and there's no better place to start than in your own home town. As we've seen already, Jesus ministry unfolds on two levels, through his word, and in the mighty works which reinforce what he is teaching. So Luke tells us – *“He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him.”* (v.15) And then quite deliberately he goes through a series of actions which would have caught the attention of those who were present. Remember, this is the carpenter's son from Nazareth, and they might have already pigeon-holed him as people are inclined to do in small towns. Let's look at what Jesus does.

He seeks out the local Jewish synagogue, the religious meeting house , where people out in the provinces would meet for worship and study. He stands up to read and (apparently) the ruler or attendant of the synagogue hands him the correct scroll which would have been appointed to be read that day. Jesus takes the scroll and reads from the text in Isaiah 61:1-2 .

Those of us who are familiar with these words will recognize them as one of the clearest messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. The Jews who knew their Bibles would have been acutely aware that these words referred to the promised deliverer, the anointed one, who would one day come as God had promised. And you can imagine the hush that fell over the gathering as this local boy begins to read these powerful words – “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.*” And when he had finished reading, he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Incidentally, this action of sitting down was the accepted symbol of a person in authority about to speak. And Luke tells us – “*The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.*” Jesus has read these highly significant words, adopted the posture of a revered teacher, and now as everyone holds their breath, he adds – “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” You could have heard a pin drop.

What are we meant to make of this series of events? It might be tempting to see Jesus as some social reformer who is about to overthrow the establishment and promote a revolution. All the references to the poor, captives, the blind and oppressed might tempt us to take this direction. But the opening words that Jesus quotes from the Isaiah passage lead us in a different direction – His primary role is “to preach the good news.” His role is first and foremost to teach and preach which he makes clear on a number of occasions, and the mighty works are tangible support for his authority in speaking. Or as W.H. Brownlee puts it “*Jesus brings redemption through a message, not a social or political reform; through a word, not a war.*” The categories of the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed were commonly applied to the righteous remnant who were waiting for the salvation of Israel. So is it any surprise that the closing words in Jesus’ sermon were that he came “*to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.*” In Isaiah this typically meant ‘the day of salvation,’ the time when all of God’s promises would be fulfilled, ‘the year of redemption,’ The words of this prophecy are echoed in the message at Christ’s birth – “...unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.”

The crowd who witnessed these events in Nazareth that day were initially impressed, but quickly things turned sour. For Jesus is not to be admired at a distance but submitted to as Lord. As the eyes of everyone were fastened on him that day, I want to remind you that we need to pause again to look at him afresh. There is a story told of a small boy who visited an art gallery in Chicago, and always came back to sit looking at one picture,

depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. As the little boy before the picture expressed it - "*I just look at Jesus and Jesus looks at me.*" As we gather here today reflect on the darkness and evil which we have momentarily left behind, we hear Jesus words again announcing the good news, telling us that the 'year of the Lord's favour' came at the first Christmas and he wants us to turn to him. He comes to speak his words of life into the dark corners of our life, we who are spiritually "*poor, and wretched and blind and naked.*" He wants us to be released from the things that imprison us, the destructive patterns of life which harm us and others. He wants open blind eyes and break into stubborn, unrepentant hearts. He wants to wash away the stain in our lives, as we have symbolized in the water of baptism. O not an outward cleansing, something done to the body, but an inward ,spiritual cleansing of the heart. For Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever and the human race is still the same in desperate need of salvation and forgiveness.

As Gareth and Margaret bring their son Theo for baptism today, they will be aware of these truths and the choices we must all make in life. When I was working in Europe I came across a number of French and Belgian survivors from the War who had experienced the German occupation. Many of these people were deeply loyal to their country and formed part of the Resistance Movement. I want you to imagine a loyal Frenchmen bringing up his son in these days of occupation, explaining that a foreign power had usurped control. They were not the legitimate rulers and he must live in the light of the liberation that would one day come. That is how Christians must believe and behave. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, God the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords will one day complete his mighty deliverance. In the meantime we have a choice. To live under the domination of the evil power and get drawn into his net, or to choose to move into the light and eagerly await the day of Christ's return.