

**TFTD 2025.05 Monday March 10th**  
**Home-town prophet: Luke 4.16-30**



Site of the ancient synagogue in Nazareth

**‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’**

After his time in the wilderness, Luke tells us, Jesus went back to Nazareth, went to the synagogue and then, in front of the community in which he had grown up, he read from the book of the Prophet Isaiah and speaking with courage, as all eyes were fixed on him, he said, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' And these words provoked first embarrassment and then rage.

It was a very audacious thing to say. In his hometown, before his whole community, Jesus read the words of Isaiah prophesying of the anointed one of God who was to come. And then he said: these words are actually about me — this is who I am. And the people were not sure they could believe their ears. Wasn't this Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter? Did he just say he was the Messiah?

Luke's Gospel says that Jesus was reading from the Book of Isaiah, but the Hebrew text of the Book of Isaiah is subtly different. Isaiah doesn't mention the blind but says, instead, that the Messiah will bind up the broken hearted. And then, after the year of the Lord's favour, Isaiah says God will have a day of vengeance and then goes on at some length to describe what this will be like.

The words of Isaiah were proclaimed to a people in exile, people held captive by a foreign power. To these exiles, working as slaves for a foreign power, the prophet says the Messiah will bring release from captivity and a restoration of their lands which will in future be worked for them by people of other nations. It will be the other nations' turn to be slaves. The boot will be on the other foot. This is the vengeance of God. It's going to feel very satisfying.

And Jesus misses all that out. And also adds something about blind people regaining their sight — which could be meant either literally or metaphorically. It might mean that people who cannot understand things properly now will be able to see things more clearly when the Messiah comes. And that might be a comment on the level of understanding of the people of Nazareth. He might have ad-libbed that bit for the benefit of his hearers.

So, what we have here is Jesus reading from scripture and editing it slightly as he reads, in such a way as to shift the emphasis or even change the meaning. Jesus fulfils Scripture while also editing it. Which has really profound implications for anybody who is trying to be a follower of Christ when it comes to reading the Old Testament. We should read the Old Testament. After all, Jesus did. And Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. But watch how he fulfils it. Watch what he takes from it. And watch what he doesn't take from it. People frequently ask me whether they should accept everything it says in the Old Testament because there are some things in it that are difficult to believe or accept. And my best answer to them is probably to say, read the Old Testament the way Jesus reads it. The fact that you think some bits of it need an edit or two probably means that you are doing that already.

And just in case the people hadn't got the message, Jesus doubled down on it. 'You probably expect me to do some healing miracles like I have been doing up the road at Capernaum. But I'm not going to'. And then he referenced two stories from the Old Testament in a way that he did want us to remember. There is the story about Elijah bringing the son of a widow back to life. Not a Jewish widow, Jesus reminded his listeners, although there would have been plenty of Jewish widows; a Gentile widow from Sidon. And then there is the story of Elisha who healed the leper. Not a Jewish leper, although there would have been plenty of those, but Naaman the Syrian, a Syrian general no less.

Not surprisingly, the audience didn't like what they heard. They were enraged and they tried to kill him but it wasn't time for Jesus to die. I think we can understand why the people of Nazareth were so angry. Doesn't charity begin at home? Before you start worrying about all these foreigners, what about our own people who need healing and justice? We recognise that, don't we? Why are they putting all these refugees in hotels? What about our own homeless? Never mind their hostages, what about our hostages? When are they being set free? What about our country? We used to be a great country. When are we going to be great again?

That's why you can't be a prophet in your own town. You might have

recognised that quote. A prophet is never loved in his own country. Why do you think that is?

You see, I think that a false prophet will tell his people that God loves them more than he loves other people and intends to favour them over other people and make the other people suffer. There are plenty of false prophets who are saying this sort of thing all round the world and, quite often they do very well out of it. But they are false prophets. They are not telling the truth about God.

A true prophet of God will proclaim that the love that God has is for all humanity. And all humanity will hear that as good news. Except, possibly, in the prophet's hometown, his own country. All they will hear is: why are you so concerned about those other people? What about us?

We have to listen to the true prophets, the ones who proclaim the fundamental truth of God's love for all humanity. These are the prophets that read Scripture the way Jesus read it. And because we are the body of Christ in this place, for the communities in which we live, we have to be those prophets. God hasn't sent anybody else.

Remember how Jesus declared to his hometown who he was. God has anointed me, he said, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim the release of captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Can you, either through words or actions, proclaim good news for the poor, release of captives, that the oppressed should go free? And that other one, the one that Isaiah missed out but Jesus added in. Recovery of sight to the blind.

Because sometimes people can't see or don't want to see that God's love is for all humanity. So we have to proclaim this to them. We have to convince them of this. We are all brothers and sisters, children of God. His love is for all of us not just for some of us. And we all need to see that. It's actually the only hope for humanity. But that's OK. Because we do have hope. The blind will recover their sight, remember? That's why

**God anointed Jesus and gave him to us. And that's why he has anointed us in turn.**

**God bless, Robin**

**You can find a fuller version of Robin's sermon on this passage on the church website: <https://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk>**