

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Epiphany 3C

Defining Moments: Today is the time of acceptance

There are many defining moments in life – moments that capture something of who we are as individuals and as a community. I think of Brittany Higgins' speech to the women's march last year and Grace Tame being named Australian of the Year.

I wonder when you remember a room being so still you could probably hear a pin drop and found your eyes fixed on the speaker.

I wonder what those in the synagogue were thinking when they heard Jesus read those words from Isaiah.

Jesus has just said 'today these words are fulfilled in your hearing.' These ancient words from Isaiah have sprung alive with new resonance.

The long promised and longed for freedom that Isaiah the prophet had spoken to those in exile had not been fulfilled for those who sat in the synagogue.

The people in the synagogue that day were among those who were still oppressed, they still found themselves in exile in their own country which was occupied by the Romans, subject to foreign laws and rulers, captive to the whims of the Roman empire as they struggled to continue a normal sort of life despite it all.

Perhaps it's a bit like that for us in a summer when we thought we were regaining some freedoms yet still find ourselves in the

grip of a pandemic and authorities who seemed to be unprepared.

This is a defining moment at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke.

The first thing that Jesus does after his baptism and time in the wilderness is to begin teaching in the synagogue.

These are the first words of teaching that we hear from Jesus' lips where he defines who he is for and what he is about.

Each gospel writer does it slightly differently. Last week we heard the story of Jesus turning water into wine from John's gospel. Matthew has the sermon on the mountain. Mark's Jesus says the kingdom of God has drawn near.

Jesus reads these words of Isaiah as one who is going to live them out and embody them in the flesh. Sure enough in Luke's gospel Jesus heals Simon's mother in law, cleanse the leper, forgives a woman condemned as a sinner by others, welcomes those who are outcasts, released those who have been excluded from community.

IN our world those four categories still remain.

I wonder what it means to be poor in our world? There are those who have inadequate food and water and struggle for a living. IN this pandemic it also means those who do not have access to good health care and vaccination – in Africa most countries have rates of only 2%vaccination.

What does it mean to be captive. Mehdi the refugee still imprisoned with 30 or so others in a hotel room with no access to fresh air knows what it is like to be trapped.

There are many in our world who are held captive by their circumstances and restrictions on their lives due to oppressive regimes or even volcanic eruptions.

There are those who are blind. Today we do not see disabilities in the same way as we used to.

Perhaps what it means is to be excluded from participating fully in the community – because they don't fit our idea of what it means to be an acceptable human being – whether by race or gender or sexuality, or by poverty.

What does it mean to be oppressed? those who live in a situation of family violence, or under powerful oppressive governments.

Jesus came and said 'today this scripture has been fulfilled.'

Now I am with you to bring good news, to bring release from what oppresses and to say that this is the year of the Lord's favour.

Today all are welcome, today you are welcome.

Today I am embodying this and will continue to live out of these words.

And there were times for Jesus himself in his life as he goes to his death that he experiences being poor and trapped in order that we might find freedom.

I wonder whether those who were listening to Jesus were surprised that the good news was not just for those listening in his own home town, but had a broader and wider reach. Perhaps this is what spurs their opposition to their home town boy.

Maybe there were ways they themselves colluded in keeping some people more oppressed than others – in defining who was clean or unclean.

Jesus' words do challenge us all to reflect on how we can collude in oppression of others and our world. In Germany in WWII it was not just those who were involved in what happened to the Jewish people but the apathy of the wider community in not noticing or doing anything.

I think we are all realising how easy it is to collude in what is happening with climate change and the many ways we all contribute to what is happening to our planet in our consumer habits.

Jesus' words also invite us to change our ways.

Jesus' words also hit us at another level. Jesus is not just talking to those people over there, but also continue to speak to us.

His words ring in our ears and they penetrate into our hearts as we are invited to reflect on where these words hit us.

Where do you feel poor, - inadequate at a loss, feeling you lack something?

Where inside yourself is the part of yourself that feels excluded?

What experience or memory holds you captive – whether it is a grief or a wound that still aches for healing?

What oppresses you and weighs heavily on your heart?

As human beings we all have elements of these – it is part and parcel of living – the wounds we absorb from each other often unintentionally.

Jesus comes and is present with us in those places deep within and comes to offer us healing and release and acceptance.

Now is the time, the year of the Lord's favour, of jubilee. For Israel the 50th year was a time when the land was rested, debts forgiven, slaves freed.

Jesus is saying that this jubilee year is now every year and can happen every day. I never forget meeting a jubilee officer in the Philippines and when I asked when the jubilee was he replied – oh every year – as he worked for human rights.

Jesus as God's son comes to us and says now is the time of welcome and release and acceptance, now is the opportunity to continue the work of healing and loving

I wonder as we are in a jubilee year of 130 years as a parish how we can take hold of this joyful hope, live lives of acceptance and belonging, welcome and love.

In this jubilee year how do we embody this welcome today, change our habits and wholeheartedly be the body of Christ.

I wonder what our defining moments will be this year – for there will be many of them as we help each other along the way.

As Evelyn Underhill said:

God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive Him there with gratitude in that sacrament.

Lectio:
Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10
Psalm 19
Luke 4.14-21