

SERMON – 24 January 2016

Reading: Luke 4: 14-21

In our reading, Jesus was preaching in His hometown synagogue. In Mark 6:1-5 we find a parallel version but without the detail of Luke. According to Mark, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach the people. Although they were amazed at his wisdom, they immediately were suspicious of the source of his knowledge. They asked themselves: Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary? Mark only says they took offence at him without going into the reasons other than suggesting Jesus' background.

Now in Luke we get the full picture. Jesus went to the synagogue and the synagogue official gave him the scroll of Isaiah 61. Visiting rabbis were often given opportunities to teach. The synagogue attendant was the official responsible for the upkeep of the building, the scrolls and all other duties. This position was eventually a paid one (but lower in authority than "rulers" of a synagogue).

Jesus stood up, as was the practice, and read it out loud to all the men in attendance. He read from three passages in Isaiah - Isaiah 61.1-2; 58.6; 42.7). Then He sat down and told them that the prophecy of Isaiah has become true in Him. He is indeed the promised Messiah. He is being sent by God "to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free".

Jesus caused offence because He was telling them that the end time had arrived in His own ministry.

Luke is setting up the scene for Jesus' ministry by providing His agenda. He is sent by God and His sending has social and political implications. He will indeed bring all the people, even the poor and the lowly into the fold of God's love. He will bring the powerful to justice.

So what is the meaning for us?

Well, Jesus told His own people that He is Immanuel – God with them. But they took offence and missed the biggest opportunity of their lives to

listen and follow Him. Yes – they missed the touch of God in their presence and allowed their preconceived ideas about Jesus' background to cloud their judgement. They did not recognise Jesus as being God in their midst.

Jesus made sure all through His ministry to teach and show the people God's love through His miracles and attitude of inclusiveness. He even made sure that He left His Holy Spirit to comfort, lead, and guide His followers after He ascended to heaven. He even said to his followers to break bread and remember His sacrifice on the cross.

And today Jesus is again in our midst through His word, and the Sacrament of Bread and Wine. He said "For where two or three are gathered in my name,.....there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20)

Now the question is: do we accept Him in our midst, or are we so busy living our lives that we cannot wait to get out of the Church? Do we listen to His appeal to love others unconditionally? Will we follow Him in the weeks to come with obedience and gratitude?

Jesus is in our midst, you and I are standing on Holy ground. Let us open our hearts to God and allow Him to change us when we eat from the bread and drink from the wine. Let us use the opportunity to show God our needs, our vulnerability and our belief that only He can change our circumstances.

There is nowhere that we cannot go, without God. There is no limit as to what God can do in his Church, in our lives, in our relationships. Yes, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Let us find hope and consolation that we are never alone and without God's love. Let us not allow life or circumstances to pull us away from God. Let us resist all temptations that want us to reject God.

Let us stand up today from the pews and walk out with only ONE intention, namely, to follow Jesus.

Amen