

## **Reflecting on God's Word**

Reading: Luke 4:14-30 (NT page 1031)

### **Who is welcome at the Lord's table?**

I pose this question in the light of what happened on this day in 1945. It was the day that the Russian troops liberated the death camp of Auschwitz. They liberated approximately 7,600 Jews.

It is clear that in Germany one man was playing God over others. He decided who was part of the super race and those who according to him, did not belong were exterminated in various ways. Shocking? But this did not stop other dictators for doing the same. We saw in it in Uganda, in Rwanda, in Bosnia, in Libya. Yes we see it now in Syria and in Northern Africa and I am sure it will always remain with us as long as humans are in charge. But this does not even stop happening all around us. There are people living around us with clear convictions who belong in the kingdom of God and those who do not belong. According to them, those who do not belong, are excluded in many ways, even excluded from the Lord's table! And often our doctrine/our beliefs become a culture, a tradition that become a barrier for people coming together and worshipping God. An example of this is: In my first charge in South Africa one woman was not allowed to come and sit at the table of the Lord because she was wearing trousers.

Maybe we must do what Jesus did a long time ago. We must confront all the things in our faith doctrine, culture and traditions that exclude people and change it for the better of all.

Jesus faced his worst enemies by going to the synagogue in his hometown, speaking to them in their comfort zone and exposing them to the Gospel of love, and conveying to them a God that does judge people of different

racess, and traditions. He quotes scripture that they all knew by heart. He quotes Isaiah chapter 61:1-2 with a difference. He leaves the bit of judgement and punishment out to further emphasize his whole point. He is the Messiah and He came as God's anointed to include all kinds of people in His kingdom, the blind, the oppressed, the prisoners, the poor and to proclaim the year of the God's favour.

Isaiah was referring to the practise whereby the Jews would celebrate a Jubilee year or a year of release, usually every seventh year. It came into practise since the Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai that when the Israelites enter the land, the land must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years they were allowed to sow their fields, and for six years prune their vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord where no one was allowed to sow their fields, prune their vineyards, reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of their untended vines. They must use everything their land yields during the Sabbath year as food for them—for themselves, their slaves, their hired workers and all guests living with them. During this year all landed property reverted to its original owner and all who were slaves were set free, and all debts were remitted.

Jesus is telling them that the Lord's year of grace have dawned upon them. He is the expected Messiah. But they did not understand because to them He was just one of them. They knew him and although Jesus quotes that a prophet is not known in its own hometown they still did not get the pun. He was off course referring to the prophet Jeremiah who was also persecuted by his own priestly town, Anathoth.

Then Jesus goes on and focus their attention on the work of the prophet Elijah. He was sent by God to a widow in the heathen land of Sidon although there were

many Jewish widows also suffering from the famine that existed for 3 and half years. And even the prophet Elisha healed a heathen leper of Syria while no other Jewish leper was healed. God included the people that they the Jews excluded. Jesus' point is clear: Nazareth will not receive him, but the non-Jews will.

And this is the crux of God's message - to include rather than to exclude.

So our reading just emphasizes again what we need to do as followers of Jesus. We must make sure everyone is included in our worship, in our churches, in our services, in our outreach to our communities, when we socialize and in our workplaces. As followers of Jesus we need to convey his message of inclusion everywhere we go. And on this day we must once again be reminded by his communion that all is welcome at his table of love.

We are all invited and we must take part as one body in love, hope, faith and peace. And we must depart as One body delivering the one message of God's forgiving grace. Every year must be a Jubilee year where we forgive others, where we celebrate God's love and abundance in the way He provides in all our needs.

And if you are sitting in this church and you struggle to forgive, struggle to include certain people in your picture of the kingdom of God, do not shy away. Confront your beliefs - address them and deal with it through the power of God's Holy Spirit. He will help you and make of you an example of God's mission to this earth. After all we are all Jock Tamson's bairns!

Amen