

SERMON: 27 January 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“What if Jesus really meant what he said?”
(Luke 4:14-21 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a)**

I want to begin by pointing out the obvious teachings from the two readings for today.

[SLIDE]

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus (the first in Christ)is:

Filled with power (after baptism **and** testing Jesus is led by the Spirit)

Teacher, usually in synagogue on sabbath

Fulfilment of the Scriptures

Anointed

Bringer of good news to the poor

Proclaimer of release of captives and recovery of sight

Freer of the oppressed

Proclaimer of favour

[SLIDE]

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Christ is (now) One Body of Many Members

God-Arranged

Multi-Gifted

Each member needs each other

There is no hierarchy of membership

The weakest members need the greatest care

What affects one member affects every member

[SLIDE]

We are all called to follow Jesus.

Following Jesus is called discipleship.

We are all then disciples of Jesus.

A disciple is one who learns from their master.

Discipleship is a way of living life not signing up to a set of beliefs.

To be in Christ means to become like Christ in our daily practices much more than it means to believe a set of doctrines about Christ.

As I've said before, and many others have too, people can see through hollow faith which is not authentic.

That's why the Jesus tells us that it is by our love, and the actions of our love, that others will know we are Christian or 'in Christ'.

This seems too simple a thing to be speaking of. After all, that's just common sense. But it seems Christians have always fared well when it comes to putting common sense into practise, or when it comes to loving enemies and outsiders.

I read a couple of things this week that confirms this.

"I often say that we do not think ourselves into a new way of living, but we live ourselves into a new way of thinking. I'm not suggesting that theory and theology are unimportant; but I believe that [SLIDE] faith is more about how we live on a daily basis than making verbal assent to this or that idea."

- Richard Rohr

"At times our evangelical fervour has come at the cost of spiritual formation. For this reason, we can end up with [SLIDE] a church full of believers, but followers of Jesus can be hard to come by."

[SLIDE] "Over the past few decades, our Christianity has become obsessed with what Christians believe rather than how Christians live. We talk a lot about doctrines but little about practice. But in Jesus we don't just see a presentation of doctrines but an invitation to join a movement that is about demonstrating God's goodness to the world."

- Shane Claiborne
- (Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?*)

Claiborne and Campolo chose to name their book *Red Letter Revolution* and they speak of Red Letter Christians after the tendency for some publishers to print the words of Jesus in red type.

And they pose the simple question, What if Jesus really meant what he said?

I wonder if we take a moment to think about that. How differently might we live if we took Jesus at his word?

Might it mean a rethinking of our relationship with money, possessions, how we listen to others, how we might respect the opinions of those who don't think like us, how we love our neighbours, how we see ourselves, how we treat foreigners, refugees, enemies?

There are lots of sermons in that list but one thing that has struck me recently is how Jesus chose to treat the Scriptures.

[SLIDE] He didn't treat the Scriptures as a list of rules. Most famously, he reduces the sacred Ten Commandments to one simple one, or two if you think love God and love your neighbour as yourself are separate, which I don't think they are.

Why did he quote some Scriptures and seem to ignore others which some would have said were important?

What was the basis of his selective use of Scripture?

For example, Jesus' selective use of Scripture in Isaiah 61, one of the readings that goes with today's readings.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,"

when Jesus, who is the Christ, stands up in the synagogue in Nazareth and is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he stops before the end of verse 2. He stops at saying he is here to fulfil the proclaiming of the year of the Lord's favour but makes no mention of a day of vengeance, which is there in the Isaiah text, something that would not have been omitted by an other rabbi?

So was Jesus employing a deliberate tactic or was he just forgetful?

I don't think he was being forgetful.

Did he miss it out to underline the truth that he [SLIDE] didn't come to judge the world rather he came to save the world (John 3:17).

But What was his basis/grounding that caused him to do this?

I think the answer to that question is that Jesus was grounded in grace and truth and rooted in the Spirit who is love. The essence of who he was, was that he was one with the Source of Love. He'd come from Love and he was living in Love. Jesus, of course, tended to describe Love as his Father.

[SLIDE] The Father and I are one (John 10:30).

So he's rooted in love, with the Spirit of his Father as his his foundation, grounding and his Guide.

[SLIDE]

When it is Christ is preaching, people will be hearing love.

When Christ is preaching, people will be feeling the pull of the Father.

When Christ is preaching, people will be experiencing a sense of freedom from burden.

When Christ is preaching, people will be hearing good news.

When Christ is preaching, broken hearts will be being mended.

When Christ is preaching, those who are mourning will be finding comfort.

You see, if these things are not happening then its not Christ that's preaching, it's some other spirit or untamed flesh.

Because that's the rub. Jesus lived and preached in the power of the Spirit. And it's that same life in the power of the Holy Spirit that we have access to, in Christ.

Paul tells the Romans (7:6) - But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but [SLIDE] in the new way of living in the Spirit.

So going back to that question, **what if** Jesus really did mean what he said?

Well, he did. And God has given us his Spirit so that we too can fulfil the desires of God.

Jesus had no shortage of critics that day in the synagogue in Nazareth. 'Who does he think he is to claim that the prophet's words are fulfilled in him?'

But we can see that Jesus was right. God had sent him to fulfil his desires of peace, reconciliation and freedom. And he is sending us with the same power to continue to be Christ in our time, each a member of the Body of Christ, each with a unique calling and ability, each with his or her part to contribute.

As we gather around the table of Christ may we receive afresh the anointing of Christ and become the real, visible, tangible, presence of Christ in the world.

Let us pray together as one body